

TO THE MEN OF THE  
MACKENZIE-PAPINEAU BATTALION  
FIGHTING ON THE BATTLE-FIELD  
OF DEMOCRATIC SPAIN





ST. EUSTACHE. DECEMBER 14, 1837  
Drawing by P. Surrey — From an old print

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1837  
The Birth  
OF  
Canadian Democracy

*By*  
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## FOREWORD

It is just one hundred years since the day when Canadians waged their first great battle for liberty. "The rebellion of 1837, defeated in a military sense, none the less won for this country the right to democratic liberty and to nationhood."

Democracy today, here as in the rest of the world, is beset with danger. Faced with an awakening to social consciousness on the part of the masses of the people, the entrenched powers of organized greed are doing all in their power to curtail or crush the democratic rights of freedom of speech, organization and assembly. The Canada of 1937, of Duplessis-Hepburn, is no stranger to such attempts.

Of all the dangers with which Democracy is threatened, not the least is the possibility that we who still enjoy some measure of freedom should allow ourselves to forget the tremendous price, in lives and sacrifice, at which that liberty was bought: and, taking its existence lightly, fail to prepare ourselves for its defence. The hundredth anniversary of the Canadian Rebellion is a reminder, Not to forget!

But this anniversary has been shrouded in a conspiracy of silence, by Canadian authorities. The financial powers which dominate Canada today are interested that the people of this country should not remember their splendid democratic tradition. Democracy, as under the Family Compact, is treated almost as something subversive.

AFFECT

The Canadian people, the workingmen and women who are the true Canada, are not forgetting! The shamefaced silence of the present rulers of this country

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is not shared by the common people. Just as, in 1837, it was they, the working people, "yeomen and mechanics," who formed the back-bone of the movement led by Mackenzie and Papineau, so once again, today, the Canadian working class is proving to be the best and truest defender of liberty, sending the best of her sons to defend Democracy with their life's blood, on the battle-fields of Spain. No more glorious commemoration could the founders of Canadian democracy receive, than that which is being written in living struggle by the Mackenzie-Papineau battalion, defending Spain and the world's liberty against the onslaught of Fascism.

\* \* \*

The purpose of the following pages is two-fold. Firstly, to contribute in some measure to the commemoration of the birth-struggle of Canadian democracy, telling in outline the story of that most decisive episode in our country's history, an episode that is little known and less understood. The attempt has been made, as far as possible, to have the actual speeches and writings, letters and newspaper articles of the period, do the telling of the story; they are more eloquent and vivid than any description of mine would be.

In the second place, it is intended that this work should serve as a starting point for an enterprise long overdue: the analysis, from the stand-point of Marxism, of our country's history. Here, only the general direction of such a work is indicated, and for a brief period. In no sense can this claim to be a work of original research. Such a task would be extremely tempting, all the more since the documentary material has been scarcely touched, and next to nothing written on the Rebellion period — a gap which can hardly be unintentional.

However, the demands and pressure of daily activity in the working-class movement in Quebec, (where the struggle to maintain democratic liberty is particularly acute) made it out of the question for the present writer to embark on such research.

There is perhaps a certain unintentional logic in the fact that a descendant of Egerton Ryerson should be the writer of this Canadian essay in Marxism. However, whereas Ryerson broke with the revolutionary movement of a century ago, and turned aside to the field of public education, his descendant has deserted the field of language and literature teaching for that of the revolutionary movement of this century, which is Communism. From a practical point of view, urgency of work in the movement has led to these pages being more fragmentary than I could have wished; but if they do but serve as a beginning for others to follow up, they will have justified themselves.

In the meantime, may these pages serve to strengthen the conviction and understanding of Canadians, heirs to a very precious heritage of struggle and of liberty; a heritage that will only be realized to the full when, under Socialism, exploitation and want and insecurity shall have been banished from our people's midst.

S. B. R.



## Chapter I

### THE SPIRIT OF DEMOCRACY.

The patriot-rebels of 1837, in Upper and Lower Canada, were inspired by a passionate love of freedom. This love of freedom, which is of the very life-blood of our Canadian democratic tradition, has its roots deep in the past. It was born of the centuries-long struggle of the rising European middle-class against oppression: a struggle whose sweep enveloped the New World along with the Old. This spirit of freedom harks back to Magna Carta, to England's Great Rebellion, to 1776 and 1789. It is the spirit which presided over the birth of the modern world.

To fail to see the Canadian revolutionary struggle of 1837 as an integral, organic part of the great revolutionary wave which brought into being modern democracy, and opened the path to the development of capitalism, is to lessen its significance, and blur its historic meaning. That such a tendency exists, few who remember their history studies will deny. It is a tendency which finds its counterpart in the embarrassed silence with which Canadian "polite society" has greeted the anniversary of the Rebellion itself.

This peculiar attitude towards our own country's history, which leads to historians deprecating the importance of its most decisive struggle, and to the rest of "society" feverishly endeavoring to forget that that struggle ever took place — is understandable, on reflection. The rising merchant and industrial capitalist class, which fought under Cromwell's and Danton's leadership, has long since been transformed into the vested interests of entrenched money-power. The class

### THE SPIRIT OF DEMOCRACY

which thanks to the 1837 Rebellion was able to develop Canada's resources and build up its own wealth, is no longer the bearer of this country's future. It has grown to hate democracy, and to fear progress. It is even afraid of the memory of its own past.

The leaders of the democratic movement in the Canadas a hundred years ago had no such unhealthy inhibitions. They breathed deep and eagerly the invigorating winds which had swept storming over old Europe and the new America to the south. They felt themselves to be, as indeed they were, the heirs to a three-fold heritage of revolutionary democracy.

By placing the Canadian revolution of 1837 in its proper setting, against the background of the revolutionary era in England, France and America, it becomes possible to approach with a proper perspective the actual economic and social relationships out of which the struggle itself arose.

What, then, was this background, and what did it mean to the Reformers and Patriots of the Canadas? CAUSES

The transition from feudal society, based on land-tenure, exploitation of serfs, and a primitive technique, to modern society, based on large-scale machine industry, and capitalist exploitation of wage-labor, extended over four centuries. The process worked itself out through a relentless social struggle between the insurgent mercantile middle class, supported by the peasant and plebeian masses, and the landowning aristocracy, secular and clerical alike, whose existence was bound up with the institutions and relationships of feudalism, lying like a solid dam across the path of the free market, free competitive production, and "free" wage-labor, demanded by capitalism. In this struggle, the Protestant Reformation, the English Rebellion



under Cromwell, and the French Revolution stand out as the great landmarks; but they are by no means the only ones; the revolutions of 1830 and 1848 in Europe, the American revolution of '76, and the American Civil War, are part and parcel of the same movement, which blasted away the obstacles and fetters of feudal society, and gave birth to the modern nations of capitalism.

As the "Communist Manifesto" puts it:

"At a certain stage . . . the feudal relations of property became no longer compatible with the already developed productive forces; they became so many fetters. They had to be burst asunder; they were burst asunder. Into their place stepped free competition, accompanied by a social and political constitution adapted to it, and by the economic and political sway of the bourgeois class."

This transition from feudalism to capitalism, from the rule of a landed oligarchy to the rule of the commercial and industrial middle-class, found its political expression in the struggle to establish parliamentary democracy and responsible government; to which was added, in the case of the colonies, the winning of an independent national existence. (In the countries of Western Europe, this national existence had been won in the battle against feudal decentralization and anarchy; in the colonies, nationhood was born of the struggle against the octopus-clutch of the Old World metropolis, along with its allies, the "new" feudal oligarchies in America).

The consciousness of this transition, from one social and political system to another, is clearly enough expressed by the leaders of the Canadian struggle. Thus Robert Gurlay, Mackenzie's forerunner in Upper

Canada, declared in an address in 1818: "It is not the men, it is the system, which blasts every hope of good, and till the system is overturned, it is in vain to expect anything of value from change of representatives or Governors".

In a celebrated passage, Mackenzie in turn exclaims: "This system cannot last, and I would be neglecting my duty to the country of my birth if I did not attempt to expose it, in order that it may be changed." Papineau speaking at Saint Laurent on May 15th, 1837, insisted that "The removal of a few guilty men would be only a partial respite to the sufferings of the people", sufferings which only a "change of system" can remedy.

We need not suppose that the actors in this drama clearly understood the full significance of this "change of system" of which they spoke; but there can be no doubt that they were aware of its deep-going character as an historic transition-point in human progress. Moreover, the formulation of the popular demands and programs by the Reformers shows an understanding of the direction in which they, with history, were moving. One example in a hundred — Mackenzie's resolution, passed by the Upper Canada Central Committee: "That the right of obtaining articles of luxury, or necessity, in the cheapest market, is inherent in the people . . ."

Freedom of the market, keystone of the bourgeois anti-feudal revolution . . .

Through a strange caprice of history the Canadas were passed by, as it were, in each of the great upheavals of the 17th and 18th centuries. When England shook under the impact of the Great Rebellion, and the English bourgeoisie won their most decisive battle, the



colony on the banks of the St. Lawrence was still under the dominion of the feudal-absolutist France of Louis XIII and XIV. When the revolutionary storm of 1789 swept the bourgeoisie of France into power, and broke the back of feudalism in Western Europe, Canada had already come under the heel of the now reactionary power of England. As for the American revolution, it was debarred from George III's colony to the North thanks to a clever policy of concessions to the clerical power which New France left behind.

However, although excluded by history from direct participation in each of these great battles for democracy, and though the problems of the democratic revolution in Canada were left unsolved, either wholly or in part, — none the less, the people of Canada were by no means completely "insulated" against the tremendous revolutionary currents of the time. On the contrary these influences inspired the wills and shaped the thoughts of the Canadian popular leaders in their struggle with the Family Compact oligarchy and the dead-weight of feudal privilege.

In his last public speech before his death, Papineau summed up in these words his life-long creed as a democrat: "The good teachings of modern times, I have found condensed, explained, and given over to the love of peoples . . . in a few lines of the Declaration of Independence of 1776 and of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen of 1789".

Of Mackenzie's debt to those traditions a recent article by R. A. Mackay states: "On both sides of the Atlantic the new wine of liberty and democracy was bursting the old bottles of restriction and privilege. Across the Atlantic the new stocks were of the vintage of the French Revolution or from the vineyards of

Adam Smith and Jeremy Bentham; on this side it was largely 'home brew' of the frontier. But there was still on hand much of the vintages of 1688 and 1776, neither of which had lost its power to stimulate men. In the 1820's and 1830's William Lyon Mackenzie was the principal purveyor of these various wines of liberty to the backwoods colony of Upper Canada".

The movement for responsible government, civil and religious liberty, and independent Canadian nationhood was thus a further projection, in a new arena, of the long-drawn struggle for democracy in Britain, France, and America. Thanks to the fact, moreover, that in Canada descendants of both the French and British peoples were fighting on the soil of America for democratic freedom, it was possible for the three strands of the revolutionary tradition of France, England and America, to be fused together in a synthesis which is unique in history.

This threefold impact of revolutionary tradition made itself felt both in the intellectual formation of the leaders of the Rebellion and in the years of conflict.

By considering briefly each of the three great sources of the Canadian democratic tradition, it will be possible to see more clearly the essential continuity, the organic unity, of the Canadian rising and the revolutionary era which preceded it and helped to shape it.

## II

Of the three, the British revolution was the most remote in point of time; and the fact that the Canadian struggle was directed in a great measure against the British Colonial Office further helped to obscure its influence. But of the existence of that influence there can be no question. The English, Scottish and Irish



settlers in Canada were profoundly mindful of the past struggles of their peoples against oppression. Moreover, the conflict which was being waged in England for the Reform bill provided the Canadian Reformers with precious allies, uniting the democratic movements on both sides of the Atlantic.

A resolution adopted at a meeting of Upper Canada reformers, in the summer of 1837, speaks in terms that show what British traditions meant to Canadian democrats a century ago:

"When a government is engaged in systematically oppressing a people, and destroying their securities against future oppression, it commits the same species of wrong to them which warrants an appeal to force against a foreign enemy. The history of England and this continent is not wanting in examples by which the rulers and the ruled may see that, although the people have often been willing to endure bad government with patience, there are legal and constitutional limits to that endurance. The glorious revolution of 1688, on one continent, and of 1776, on another, may serve to remind those rulers who are obstinately persisting in withholding from their subjects adequate securities for good government, although obviously necessary for the permanence of that blessing, that they are placing themselves in a state of hostility against the governed; and that to prolong a state of insecurity and irresponsibility such as existed in England during the reign of James II, and as now exists in Lower Canada, is a dangerous act of aggression against a people . . ."

The speech of Lord Brougham in the Upper House, in the debate of Jan. 18, 1838, on the Government's policy toward Canada, is a magnificent tribute to the continuity of the British and Canadian struggles for

Democracy: "And after all, when men so vehemently blame the Canadians, who is it, let me ask, that taught them to revolt? Where — in what country — from what people did they learn that lesson? You exclaim against their revolt — though you have taken their money against their wishes, and set at naught the rights you boasted of having conferred upon them . . . You say, the whole dispute for which they have rebelled is about the taking of twenty thousand pounds without the consent of their Representatives! Twenty thousand pounds without their consent! Why, it was for twenty shillings thus taken that Hampden resisted — and by his resistance, won for himself an immortal name, which the Plantagenets and the Guelphs would give all the blood that swells their veins, to boast of! If to resist oppression — if to rise against usurped power, and defend our liberties when assaulted, be a crime — Who are the greatest of all criminals? Who but ourselves, the English people? We it is that have set the example to our American brethren. Let us beware how we blame them too harshly for following it!"

Mackenzie, who in an open letter to the Governor, Sir John Colborne, in 1830 had referred to the "fundamental rights" conferred by "the principles of the revolution of 1688", felt the greatest enthusiasm over the passage of the Reform bill. The "Colonial Advocate" of July 19th, 1832, proclaims: "Rejoice, Canadians! Britannia, the loved Island of your sires, — She whose free institutions hath taught the nations to seek and find freedom's fair form, will now herself be free!"

The hopes placed in the Reform Ministry by Mackenzie were foredoomed to disillusionment; but the winning of the extension of the franchise in Britain none the less inspired and gave impetus to the Canadian movement.



## III

The second great influence which entered into the making of the Canadian democratic tradition was that of the revolutionary struggle of the colonies to the South: the spirit of '76. The fate of Canada has been determined in no small degree by the interplay of forces arising from her existence as a British country on the soil of America; and at no time has this been more true than in the period under discussion.

The new British possession on the banks of the St. Lawrence was kept safe for its conquerors at the time of the American Revolution thanks to the concessions contained in the Quebec Act of 1774, which gave the French clergy the assurance of their continued dominance in what had been New France. However under the pressure of the fear of the recent upheaval to the South, Britain in 1791 granted to the now divided provinces of Upper and Lower Canada, the institution of elective Legislative Assemblies. Thus the very first elements of democracy introduced into Canada, were a by-product of the war for independence of the American colonies. When, forty-five years later, the enforced impotence of the Assemblies led the Canadians to take up arms to win responsible government, the American influence endured as a powerful factor in the conflict.

This influence appears both in the propaganda of the Reformers and in the organizational forms adopted by their movement.

In Upper Canada, Mackenzie's visit to the States was followed by the publication in 1833 of his "Sketches of Canada and the United States", in which the backwardness and misery of oppressed Canada were eloquently contrasted with the flourishing prosperity of the young Republic. In the "Constitution", (Successor to

the "Advocate"), Mackenzie reprinted Patrick Henry's speech "Give me Liberty or give me Death", and announced the publication of Tom Paine's revolutionary classic, "Common Sense". The Declaration of the Toronto Reformers, adopted in August, 1837, clearly reflects the influence of the American Declaration of Independence. The latter declaration, proceeding from the "unalienable Rights . . . Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness", proclaims: "That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or abolish it". The Canadian declaration affirms: "Government is founded on the authority, and is instituted for the benefit of the people; when, therefore, any Government long and systematically ceases to answer the great ends of its foundation, the people have a natural right given them by their Creator to seek after and establish such institutions as will yield the greatest quantity of happiness to the greatest number."

In Lower Canada, Mackenzie's "Sketches" were translated and published in the Patriot journal, "Echo du Pays". The American example appeared with ever greater frequency in the speeches of Papineau and in the resolutions of the popular assemblies. One resolution, adopted at Saint Ours on May 7, 1837, deplors the fact that the Canadians had not made common cause with their American brothers, in 1775. In the parades and demonstrations of the Patriots, the American Eagle, wings outspread, figured on the banners as a symbol of republican liberty.

At the meeting at Saint-Laurent, May 15th, 1837, Papineau declared: "Whoever has made himself familiar with the history of the just and glorious revolution of the United States, has beheld, on the part of



the most enlightened and most virtuous men in the world, so unanimous an applause for the heroic and moral resistance opposed by the Americans to the usurpation of the British parliament, which wished to despoil them and appropriate their revenue, just as it is attempting to do with ours to-day, — That we would be associating ourselves with the greatest and purest reputations of modern times, if we marched with success along the path blazed by the patriots of '74!"

The methods of work, as well as the speeches and resolutions of the Canadians, bore the imprint of the American influence. "Committees of Vigilance", "Correspondence Committees", "Committees of Public Safety", were terms frequently employed. In Lower Canada, the "Fils de la Liberté" took their name directly from the American "Sons of Liberty". Like the rebels of '74, the Patriots preached a boycott of British goods as a means of bringing the Colonial Office to its knees. Indeed, up to the very outbreak of armed conflict, Papineau insisted on this as the main method of struggle.

#### IV

The last of the three powerful influences which helped to inspire and mould the course of the Canadian battle for democracy, is that of the great French Revolution. This event, which dominated European history for half a century and whose work was carried forward by the Revolutions of 1830 and 1848, could not fail to leave its imprint on those who grew up in its aftermath. Notwithstanding the fact that Canada, having come under the control of Britain, escaped the direct impact of the revolution, the influence of 1789, and later that of 1830 and '48 none the less penetrated the colony to a greater degree than is generally known.

This influence of the French Revolution on the Canadian democratic movement may be divided into two phases: First, the years of revolutionary ferment and upheaval in France — the last quarter of the XVIIIth century; Second, the period from 1830 on, following the July revolution in France, when the struggle between the Canadian Assemblies and the oligarchy began to reach a stage of extreme intensity.

The first phase is the one during which the revolutionary-materialist thought of the French Encyclopedists was being spread abroad, providing incidentally the future intellectual nourishment of the Canadian democrats. It is no accident that in the voluminous list of books read by Mackenzie in his early years we find such works as Montesquieu's "Spirit of Law", Voltaire's and D'Alembert's correspondence, and Mirabeau's works.

It was however mainly in Lower Canada that the French influence was important. The rabidly anti-democratic French-Canadian historian, Abbé Lionel Groulx, has presented valuable evidence, in his essay on the Religious Thought of Papineau, of the penetration into Canada of what he pleases to call "pernicious and subversive doctrines" of democracy.

In the years following the British conquest, books from France were brought into the colony as contraband, smuggled in the bottom of trunks, by travellers and students. In 1778 a group of disciples of Voltaire grew up in Montreal, with the "Gazette littéraire" as their organ. On being condemned by the Montreal Academy for publishing works of the French "philosophes", the group retorted that Voltaire was the "wisest of men", "the enemy of Despotism", a "universal genius". One curé of the time declared that



"about 1800, there was much unbelief in the country, and the wicked books of Voltaire, etc., etc., were, I believe, very widely spread." After the peace was signed, in 1783, between England and the American colonies the importation of French books became easier. The Bishop of Quebec complained in 1794 that they were "flooding the country". A public library started in Quebec city included 40 volumes of Voltaire, 23 of Rousseau and 35 of the Encyclopedia. A merchant who came into possession of a whole ship-load of books, including some magnificent editions of the works of the XVIIIth century philosophers, sold them off cheap, and had them spread through the countryside. "The priests", relates Abbé Casgrain, "alarmed at this sudden invasion of dangerous books, imposed great sacrifices on themselves to get them away from the public, buying them themselves, destroying the worst ones and hiding away the others. Despite this, a great number were spread about". \*

In the early 1830's, the rising tide of conflict in the Canadas coincided with a resurgence of French revolutionary influence. A number of French-Canadian democrats organized a public subscription on behalf of the victims of the 1830 July revolution. This gesture of solidarity was to be answered when, seven years later, Republicans in France set about organizing the sending of volunteers to fight in the ranks of the people's revolutionary forces in Canada — a project

\* The presence of this revolutionary leaven in Lower Canada helps to explain the answer given by Papineau to the priest of Montebello, when the latter asked him when it was that he had lost his religious faith. "At eighteen years", was the reply, "at the Seminary of Quebec!" Papineau's biographer, Rumilly, refers to him as "a great reader of the Encyclopedists and of the English philosophers," and of the former, mentions Diderot specifically.

which was cut short by the crushing of the Rebellion.

In the streets and in their meetings, the young Canadian heirs of 1789 addressed one another as "Citoyen" (citizen), and displayed, alongside the American eagle, the Phrygian bonnet of the Paris Republicans. Their leader, Papineau, they acclaimed as the "Mirabeau of America" . . .

When, ten years after the crushing of our Rebellion, the revolutionary storm of 1848 swept over Europe, the Canadian democrats, their struggle not yet ended, saluted their European brothers. A huge mass-meeting in Montreal voted an enthusiastic address of greeting to the "young heroes" of Paris. The newspaper "l'Avenir" echoed its applause: "We are democrats! nothing more. But democrats who rejoice each time . . . that the political atmosphere vibrates at the sound of an age-old throne crashing under the blows of democracy!"

\* \* \*

It is against this background that we must follow the rise of the democratic movement in the Canadas. If the trumpet-blasts of the European revolutions could find an echo on the shores of the St. Lawrence and of the Great Lakes, it was because there too existed the material conditions which called forth the struggle for democracy, and the social forces which were to create a new, industrial world.

It is those conditions and social forces which we must now discuss.



## Chapter 2

### LAND, CAPITAL, STATE POWER . . .

The 1837 Rebellion was in aim and content an anti-feudal, anti-colonial bourgeois-democratic revolution. As such, it takes its place in the long series of battles waged by the rising capitalist class against the medieval restrictions of feudalism, and for the conquest of democratic rights, state power and independent nationhood.

Of course, the democratic revolution was at no time a simple, schematic process. Even that of '89 in France, while a classical example of the seizure of power by the bourgeoisie, was not fully completed without the ebb and flow of three further revolutions — those of 1830, 1848, and 1870. The complex interplay of social relationships in the transition from feudalism to capitalism calls for a study of each individual case, with all its particular characteristics. Especially is this true of the bourgeois-democratic revolutions that have been fought out on the soil of the New World; for here the relations with the Metropolis and the "transplanting" of Old World institutions into a new setting create new and peculiar problems.

In the case of Canada, we find a further complicating factor, in the existence, side by side, of two different stages of social evolution. Three quarters of a century after the British conquest, the institutions of pre-revolutionary, feudal France still remained in existence on the banks of the St. Lawrence; while superimposed upon them, and extending over the Upper Province, was a set-up dominated by a new merchant-landlord oligarchy, roughly corresponding to the stage

### LAND, CAPITAL, STATE POWER

of development of the British bourgeois-landlord regime of the end of the XVIIIth century. \*

We have already referred to the numerous expressions, on the part of the Canadian reformers, of the necessity for a basic "change of system", if the problems confronting their country's development were to be solved. Lord Durham, in his "Report", published in 1839, voiced essentially the same opinion. "I soon became satisfied", he stated, "that I must search in the very composition of society . . . for the causes of the constant and extensive disorder which I witnessed".

Before tracing the actual collisions between the classes of Canadian society, which culminated in armed conflict, let us examine briefly the problems which gave rise to the struggle: problems which can be summed up as those of Land, Capital, and State-Power . . .

## II

Lower Canada, like Mexico, was one of the few areas on the North American continent where the institutions and relationships of feudalism had been brought into being in their completeness. With the emergence of capitalist machine-industry, based on wage-labour and advanced technique, the problem, arose here as elsewhere, of eliminating these outgrown property relationships, based on land-tenure and primitive agrarian production.

One writer speaks of the "old feudal system which sat like a huge incubus on Lower Canada"; Durham declared that the "abuses of the seignorial system" were the cause of the suffering of the mass of the

\* The England of George III, says Beard in his "Rise of American Civilization", was governed by a "few thousand landlords and merchant capitalists".



French population, and that "There is every reason to believe, that a great number of the peasants who fought at St-Denis and St. Charles, imagined that the principal result of success would be the overthrow of tithes and feudal burthens". The declaration of independence of the Lower Canada patriots placed as one of the main demands, the abolition of feudal tenure.

The first feudal grant in Canada had been that accorded, in 1623, to Louis Hébert, crown prosecutor under Champlain. "Having left his relatives and friends to help to establish a colony of Christian people in lands which are deprived of the knowledge of God . . . he has by his painful labours and industry cleared lands, fenced them, and erected buildings for himself, his family and his cattle . . . to encourage those who may hereafter desire to inhabit and develop the country of Canada" — so reads his patent, allowing him a domain one league wide and four leagues deep, on the St-Charles River, "to have and to hold in 'fief noble' forever".

The religious motive was the official pretext for the conquest of the New World by his most Christian Majesty: that it was not the main reason, however, is hinted in the charter granted a few years later to the Company of One Hundred Associates, ordering them not only to "dispose the natives to the Christian religion," but to "draw from these lands, newly discovered, some advantageous commerce for the utility of the King's subjects".

In other words, within the framework of feudal society the motive of profit through commerce had already assumed importance. "Pure", static feudalism was already in gestation, pregnant with the dynamic forces of Capital. An additional fact deserves notice:

the seigneurs of Old France were not people who "cleared lands, fenced them, erected buildings for themselves and their cattle"! The new colonial land-owning class was not a simple replica of the aristocracy of France, but a new phenomenon. The Hébert just mentioned had been an apothecary: and the seigneurs who followed him sprang in the main from the intermediate strata, the merchants, petty nobility and soldiery. Only four families of the high nobility of France came to settle in Canada.

By the time of the British conquest, rather less than 400 seigneurs had been granted lands totalling 5,888,716 acres. The Roman Catholic Church, represented by 154 monks and priests, and 175 nuns, had received 2,096,754 acres.

In the main, the system of land-tenure established in New France corresponded to that in force in the old land. Of six different kinds of grants, that "in fief" or "en seigneurie" was the most frequent. The seigneur, on coming into possession of his estate, paid fealty and homage to his overlord, the King, or his representative. A money tribute, the "quint" (one fifth of the value of the seigniorie) had to be paid on every change of ownership. In addition, the seigneur was obliged to provide military service at the demand of his overlord. Finally, he was bound to sub-grant his domain to tenants, in order to further colonization. This last obligation was of course peculiar to the colony, as no such necessity existed in the Old World.

The tenant-settlers received their allotments "en censive", or in return for the payment of the feudal dues, "cens et rentes". As vassals, they likewise paid fealty and homage to their overlord. The "cens" was a variable tax levied by the seigneur. The "rentes",



likewise variable, made up the main payment of the tenant, and took the form of both money payments and payment in kind. In addition, there were the "lods et ventes", a fee of one twelfth of the value of the land for each change in ownership. Failure to pay the feudal dues entailed loss of the grant.

Not only were direct payments exacted from the tenants, or "censitaires"; the seigneur also possessed the so-called "banal rights". These included the fees received for the obligatory use by the tenant of his overlord's mill, and, more rarely, of the seigneur's oven; the "corvée", or forced labour on the seigneur's domain for a specified number of days in the year; further, the seigneur possessed the sole right to hunt and fish on his domain.

Finally, the exercise of "high justice" gave the seigneur all but absolute power over the life and limb of his "censitaires".

A very interesting letter, published in the Lower Canada revolutionary paper, the "Minerve", on March 9, 1837, describes at length what the correspondent calls "the frightful picture of feudal oppression". The letter begins by quoting the letter of a previous correspondent — "What use is there in going to court with the seigneur? he is richer than we, and will end by ruining us utterly". "Such," says the writer, "is the hopeless cry of the weak victims of feudal despotism". Victims of this oppression are the "farmers who can have no land without submitting to revolting conditions of servitude, corvées, arbitrary rents, rights of 'lods et ventes', new titles, banal rights, reservation (by the seigneur) of wood, waters, fishing, hunting, minerals, lime, stone, sand, etc." Going on to speak of the tyranny and abuses of the seigneurs, the corres-

pondent describes the case of one "habitant" of St. François du Lac, who was sentenced to a fine of £21 for being short 8 shillings 4 pence in his payment of seigniorial dues. He concludes: "If we enter upon a struggle, we must conquer, or perish in slavery. But who can vanquish us if we are unanimously convinced of the appropriateness and the justice of the system we wish to substitute to that which we condemn. That is the main point, before which all else must yield, even the brutal force of a government". (Letter signed "Un Bon Censitaire", "Minerve", 9 mars, 1837).

### III

With the British conquest of New France, most of the seigneurs abandoned the colony to return to France; only twenty-two families of the French colonial "noblesse" remained behind.

This mass departure of the old seigniorial ruling class did not entail any basic change in the feudal conditions in Lower Canada. The old seigneurs were simply replaced by new ones: British officers and merchants, speculators and land-grabbers.

It was hardly a change for the better. The mass of French-speaking "censitaires" now found themselves under the domination of foreign overlords, a fact which only added to the bitterness of feudal ties. Moreover, when the American Revolution was followed by a mass migration of Loyalists into Canada, the British government instituted the system of "free grants," in which the proviso of obligatory settlement (contained in the seigniorial grants) was no longer maintained.

It was on the basis of this system that there came into being a new land-owning oligarchy, later to be christened the "Family Compact". Thus arose "the



plague of large landholders which has so greatly hindered the settlement and material advancement of the Province . . . It was under this regime that the system of township leaders and associates originated, which, in less than 15 years, from 1796 to 1809, gave 1,457,209 acres of the best crown lands into the possession of about 70 persons, one of whom, Nicholas Austin, obtained in 1797 a quantity of 62,621 acres of land in the township of Bolton".

Among the beneficiaries of these land grants were merchant-capitalists who had enriched themselves in the fur-trade; such was Simon McTavish, of the North West Company, who was granted the seignior of Terrebonne, north of Montreal.

Durham sums up thus the results of the riot of land-grabbing:

"By official returns which accompany this Report, it appears that, out of about 17,000,000 of acres comprised within the surveyed districts of Upper Canada, less than 1,600,000 are yet unappropriated, and this amount includes 450,000 acres (the reserve for roads), leaving less than 1,200,000 acres open to grant; and of this remnant, 500,000 acres are required to satisfy claims for grants founded on pledges by the Government. In the opinion of Mr. Radenhurst, the really acting Surveyor General, the remaining 700,000 consist for the most part of land inferior in position or quality. It may almost be said, therefore, that of the whole of the public lands in Upper Canada, out of 6,169,963 acres in the surveyed townships, nearly 4,000,000 acres have been granted or sold; and there are unsatisfied but indisputable claims for grants to the amount of about 500,000. In Nova Scotia, nearly 6,000,000 of acres have been granted.

"In Upper Canada, a very small proportion (perhaps less than a tenth) of the land thus granted has been even occupied by settlers, much less reclaimed and cultivated. In Lower Canada, with the exception of a few townships bordering on the American frontier, which have been comparatively well settled, in despite of the proprietors, by American squatters, it may be said that nineteen-twentieths of these grants are still unsettled, and in a perfectly wild state."

In addition to the grants to individuals, there were the Clergy reserves — 3,000,000 acres set aside in Upper and Lower Canada for the up-keep of the Church of England clergy; To begin with, the Church of England represented only a fraction of the English population, the greater part of whom were Dissenters; and to make matters worse, even in obtaining this colossal grant, "irregularities" permitted this section of the clergy to get its hands on some half-million acres over and above what had been legally accorded to it.

The effect of the creation of these vast landed estates was to oppose a very material obstacle to the development of communications, of exchange, of the market — all indispensable prerequisites to the future development of capitalist industry.

"Large tracts become the property of individuals, who leave their lands unsettled and untouched. Deserts are thus interposed between the industrious settlers; the natural difficulties of communication are greatly enhanced; the inhabitants are not merely scattered over a wide space of country, but are separated from each other by impassable wastes; the cultivator is cut off or far removed from a market in which to dispose of his surplus produce, and procure other commodities; and the greatest obstacles exist to co-operation in la-



bour, to exchange, to the division of employments, to combination for municipal or other public purposes, to the growth of towns, to public worship, to regular education, to the spread of news, to the acquisition of common knowledge and even to the civilizing influences of mere intercourse for amusement."

A few pages further on, Durham gives a striking example of the backwardness of communication facilities in Upper Canada:

"The inconvenience arising from want of roads is very great, and is best illustrated by an instance which came under my own observation in 1834. I met a settler from the township of Warwick on the Caradoc Plains, returning from the grist mill at Westminster, with the flour and bran of thirteen bushels of wheat; he had a yoke of oxen and a horse attached to his wagon, and had been absent nine days, and did not expect to reach home until the following evening. Light as his load was, he assured me that he had to unload wholly or in part several times, and, after driving his wagon through the swamps, to pick out a road through the woods where the swamps or gulleys were fordable, and to carry the bags on his back and replace them in the wagon. Supposing the services of the man and his team to be worth two dollars per day, the expense of transport would be twenty dollars. As the freight of wheat from Toronto to Liverpool (England) is rather less than 2s. 6d. per bushel, it follows that a person living in this city could get the same wheat ground on the banks of the Mersey, and the flour and bran returned to him at a much less expense than he could transport it from the rear of Warwick to Westminster and back — a distance less than 90 miles."

Undeveloped landed property, held by absentee

owners, clergy, and retired merchant capitalists, lay like a solid dam across the path of any possible industrial development. Either the dam would be blasted away, and the stranglehold of the Family Compact oligarchy be broken — or else, stagnation! The land-monopoly, a sort of commercialized feudalism, loomed as the dominating problem before the Canadas of the first third of the XIXth century. Writing from exile, after the defeat of the Rebellion, W. L. Mackenzie painted in these words the picture of Family Compact Canada:

"I had long seen the country in the hands of a few shrewd, crafty, covetous men, under whose management one of the most lovely and desirable sections of America remained a comparative desert. The most obvious public improvements were stayed; dissension was created among classes; citizens were banished and imprisoned in defiance of all law; the people had been long forbidden, under severe pains and penalties from meeting anywhere to petition for justice; large estates were wrested from their owners in utter contempt of even the forms of the courts; the Church of England, the adherents of which were few, monopolized as much of the lands of the colony as all the religious houses and dignitaries of the Roman Catholic Church had had control of in Scotland at the era of the reformation; other sects were treated with contempt and scarcely tolerated; a sordid band of land-jobbers grasped the soil as their patrimony, and with a few leading officials, who divided the public revenue among themselves, formed the Family Compact, and were the avowed enemies of common schools, of civil and religious liberty, of all legislative or other checks to their own will. Other men had opposed, and been converted by



them. At nine and twenty I might have united with them, but chose rather to join the oppressed, nor have I ever regretted that choice, or wavered from the object of my early pursuit."

## IV

Among the slogans which appeared on the banners of the Reformers, none was more significant than that which, with unconscious humour, proclaimed at a meeting of Papineau's followers "Our children and our other domestic manufactures!"

For the first two and a half centuries after the discovery of Canada, the economic life of the colony had hinged primarily on two commodities — fish and furs ("fasting — and fashion"). The profits from fisheries and the fur-trade had gone to swell the stream of accumulated capital which, with the industrial revolution, translated itself into the factories, plant machinery of the new industrial England. The revolution in the American colonies opened the path to a parallel expansion of manufacturing in the United States. But to the north of the American border, the attempt to create and develop industrial production was consistently frustrated.

True, there existed "a considerable body of settlers who, seeing the abundant natural resources about them, wanted a free hand and a command of resources with which to engage in manufacturing". Their spokesman in the first decade of the XIXth century was Judge Thorpe, who in a letter to the Secretary of State, on Aug. 14th, 1807, declared: "I strove to cherish what was in infancy, Fur, Flour and Potash, and to bring forth what was in embryo, Iron, Hemp and Lumber".

A few years later, in 1822, the "Montreal Gazette", published the following news-item from York:

"It would be difficult for us to do justice to those feelings of exultation with which we announce the compleat success of two experiments highly important to the commerce, manufacturers, and future wealth and power of this great and promising country. We allude to the progress of the **Marmora Iron Works**, and the superior articles of Bar Iron manufactured there; and to the success of an experiment wherein a specimen of Canadian **Hemp** was tried against an English Bolt in the Navy Yard at Kingston."

Nevertheless, the strivings of Judge Thorpe and the exultation of the "Gazette" were doomed alike to disappointment. The land monopoly, and the Family Compact oligarchy whose power was based on it, blocked the path to industrial expansion. By the 1830's the stranglehold of this régime, seconded by the cramping restrictions of Colonial rule, had brought the Canadas to a state of stagnation and decay. Potential productive forces were stifled by dominant property-relations; and as long as the latter could not be broken down, progress remained illusory and retrogression became more and more a reality.

The rule of a landlord-merchant oligarchy content to invest their accumulated capital in landed estates, and to play at being an "aristocracy", excluded the possibility of any stimulus to capital investment in industry and manufactures. The result: a poverty in capital, an economic stagnancy, and an immigration problem, which were the theme of repeated protests by the Reformers, and to which Durham eloquently bore witness in his Report . . .

"While the present state of things is allowed to



last, the actual inhabitants of these Provinces have no security for person or property, no enjoyment of what they possess, **no stimulus to industry**. The development of the vast resources of these extensive territories is arrested; and the population, which should be attracted to fill and fertilize them, is directed into foreign states. Every day during which a final and stable settlement is delayed, the condition of the Colonies becomes worse, the minds of men more exasperated, and the success of any scheme of adjustment more precarious."

In a later passage, Durham speaks of **"the existence of deep-seated impediments in the way of industrial progress."** The Maritimes, like the Canadas, have "an aspect of poverty, backwardness, and stagnation." Major Head describes his journey through a great part of Nova Scotia as exhibiting the melancholy spectacle of half the tenements abandoned, and lands everywhere falling into decay . . . "

The cause, Durham concludes, is "the possession of almost the whole soil . . . by absentee proprietors who would neither promote nor permit its cultivation combined with the defective government which first caused and has since perpetuated the evil".

French and English, Upper and Lower Canadian all repeat the refrain. Writing from St. Catharines W. H. Merritt complains that "the proceeds of all the lands are vested in Great Britain when the Province is literally **begged for want of capital**". A correspondent of the "Montreal Gazette," in 1833, declares that "some change in our circumstances is absolutely necessary to prevent ruin"; lands lying waste, a country "poor and almost penniless" — these things can be changed, he writes, "By British industry, by British capital . . . By British capital, I mean a portion of

wealth which is now locked up in England, at present yielding little or nothing to its possessors, but which if expended here, in aid of industry, would not only effect the objects so important to us, but be rendered productive."

The French reform paper, "Le Canadien," stated the same problem from only a slightly different point of view: "The patrimony of our ancestors will soon be in the hands of foreigners . . . **We pay tribute yearly to the gods of Great Britain, and the Capital which, founded amongst us, could have encouraged the arts, science and industry, is wholly lost and swallowed up in the treasury of our lofty masters and overlords, the Canada Land companies.**"

Little wonder, that the Canadian middle-class and their spokesmen looked with envy at the very different picture presented by the United States; there, in the revolution and its aftermath, the sway of the landed gentry had met its death-blow; and industry and manufacture were making uninterrupted headway. As a result of Canadian backwardness, the difference between the market values of lands in Canada and in the States ranged from several hundred to as much as a thousand per cent. In proportion to population, Upper Canada possessed a banking capital of only one fifth the amount owned in the State of New York . . . ]

## V

If money-capital was lacking, and could not be substituted with any assurance of success until the ruling class should be dislodged, the same could not be said of the other, human, component. Year after year, ships of propertiless proletarians, the overflow from the new-blown factory hells of industrial England, were



landed at Quebec. In the first quarter of the nineteenth century they numbered close to half a million. Shipped out like cattle, deaths among these unhappy immigrants averaged 30 to 40 per voyage, in each vessel. The records state that in one year the number of British subjects who died from destitution or disease either on shipboard or in hospitals on their arrival reached the grand total of 17,445.

Durham speaks of "the accumulation of wretched paupers at Quebec", and goes on to quote the following evidence:

"Dr. Moring, a gentleman of high professional and personal character, Inspecting Physician of the Port of Quebec, and Commissioner of the Marine and Emigrant Hospital, says; — "I am almost at a loss for words to describe the state in which the emigrants frequently arrived; with a few exceptions, the state of the ships was quite abominable; so much so, that the harbour-master's boatmen had no difficulty, at the distance of gun-shot, either when the wind was favourable or in a dead calm, in distinguishing by the odour alone a crowded emigrant ship. I have known as many as from 30 to 40 deaths to have taken place, in the course of a voyage, from typhus fever on board of a ship containing from 500 to 600 passengers.

"As to those who were not sick on arriving, I have to say that they were generally forcibly landed by the masters of vessels, without a shilling in their pockets to procure them a night's lodging, and very few with the means of subsistence for more than a very short period. They commonly established themselves along the wharfs and at the different landing-places, crowding into any place of shelter they could obtain, where they subsisted principally

on the charity of the inhabitants. For six weeks at a time, from the commencement of the emigrant-ship season, I have known the shores of the river along Quebec, for about a mile and a half, crowded with these unfortunate people, the places of those who might have been removed off being constantly supplied by fresh arrivals, and there being daily drafts of from 10 to 30 taken to the hospital with infectious disease."

Another medical officer of the same period gives a similar description, insofar as the Irish immigrants are concerned:

"I hope", he writes, "there are few towns in Christendom where such an amount of disease and destitution exists as in Quebec . . . This misery does not touch the native poor, but the fever-stricken, naked and friendless Irish — a people truly scattered and peeled — who year after year are thrown in shoals upon the wharfs of Quebec from ships which ought to be called itinerant pest-houses.

" . . . These poor creatures, on landing, creep into any hovel they can, with all their foul things about them. When they are so numerous as to figure in the streets, they are put I believe by the Colonial Government into dilapidated houses, with something like barracks" . . .

"The filthy and crowded state of the houses, the disgusting scenes going on in them, can only be guessed by a very bold imagination. I have trod the floor of one of such houses, almost over shoes in churned and sodden garbage, animal and vegetable. It required dissecting-room nerves to bear it."

The factory-fodder was there, waiting to be absorbed in the maw of the factory-system; but the lack of capital, and the Family Compact régime, made its



presence all but useless. Thus increasing numbers of immigrants, instead of remaining in Canada, crossed over to the United States. In 1820, replying to a question of Lord Hamilton, the British Chancellor of the Exchequer admitted that the emigrants to Canada "so far from finding increased means of subsistence had experienced a want of employment fully equal to that existing in the most distressed manufacturing districts of this country."

One estimate is quoted by Durham, to the effect that out of every hundred immigrants into Canada, sixty were leaving for the United States. "Both the people and the capital," says Durham, "seem to be quitting these distracted provinces."

## VI

If the main cause of the wretched condition of the Canadas in the first third of the century was to be found in the domination of the reactionary landlord-merchant oligarchy, a second cause was the colonial status and restrictions imposed by the metropolis. The first colonial empire of England was considered by its Mercantilist rulers as a vast field of commercial exploitation. The Mercantilist theory, as opposed to the later "laissez-faire" and Free trade doctrines, hinged on what one writer aptly called the "three R's, of Restriction, Regulation and Restraint". The Navigation Acts, forbidding transport of goods to or from a colony in any but British ships, were one part of the policy. Opposition to the development of local manufactures and industry in the colonies, was another. A ban on clothing manufacture in the Canadas was imposed in 1768; in 1784, restrictions were imposed on commerce with the United States and the West Indies.

As was to be expected, the successful rising of the American colonies delivered a powerful blow to the whole basis of mercantilist colonial policy. Nevertheless, it was not until 1849 that the Navigation Laws were repealed in their entirety. So long as the insurgent middle class did not revolt against colonial status, the Canadian provinces continued to suffer the weight of hampering restrictions.

Even the conservative "Quebec Gazette", of Aug. 9, 1821, complained of these restrictions: "The power of regulating the trade of the Colonies, which belongs to the British Parliament, is in fact a power over the fortunes, the industry, and the prosperity of every individual in the Colonies. It is a Magic Wand at whose motions our limbs may be dried up, and our prosperity vanish like a shadow . . .

"The state of trade to which we have alluded, and which has produced such a fall in the price of Grain, has, in consequence of the regulations in the British Parliament, excluded our agricultural produce altogether from a market. The granaries of our farmers, and the stores of our merchants, are now loaded with wheat, and no price whatever can be obtained for this article . . . while a great number of the farmers, having been so imprudent as to get into debt, calculating on the usual price for their grain, are in danger of seeing their lands, their houses, their cattle, implements and furniture, altogether devoured in the Courts of Law, or sold for not one half their usual value.

"If this state of things were solely the result of natural causes, or our own acts, it would be silly and useless to petition; but, partially at least, it is owing to the operation of British Statutes.

"These Statutes restrain us from trying to obtain



a market, and making purchases all over the world; they restrain foreigners from coming here to purchase or sell, should they be so inclined; they oblige us to have our goods carried solely in British ships—in short, they oblige us to buy and sell there, and then, by the operation of the Corn Laws, they enact, in effect, that we shall not buy or sell at all."

In its issue of the previous day, the Reform paper "Le Canadien", had attributed the fact that "the general distress of the country is becoming ever more alarming," to the effect of the "restrictive laws" affecting Canadian lumber and wheat.

As late as 1846 the average rates of freight to Liverpool showed the following margin: from New York — 2s. 6 1/2 d. per barrel; from Montreal — 5s. 1 1/2 d. This resulted in no small measure from what the "Canadian Economist" of that year described as the "ruinous operation of the British Navigation Laws." No foreign vessel was allowed to come up the St. Lawrence above Quebec, and any cargo that was to be taken in a foreign ship had first to be shipped from Montreal in a British vessel, then transferred.

The power of the British authorities to regulate colonial trade included the imposition of duties; trade by land or water between the State of New York and the province of Upper Canada was dependent on the whim of the authorities in London. As a result, smuggling and circumvention of the Imperial regulations were everywhere rife. Transfer to the Provincial Legislatures of the power to regulate and impose duties was one of the insistent demands of the Canadian bourgeoisie.

A final grievance was the exorbitant price of British merchandise sold in the Colonies: retail prices "being, on an average, one hundred and fifty per cent.

higher than they are in Britain. The different articles of wearing apparel cost nearly twice as much as they do on the other side of the Atlantic, and are of very inferior quality." George Ryerson, brother of Egerton, on his way to England in 1831 with a petition of the Upper Canada Reformers, mentions in a letter the fact that "it has been customary in England to ship unfashionable and unsaleable goods for the Canadian markets." The Canadians were indeed treated as "colonials"!

In the very first number of Mackenzie's "Colonial Advocate", the Upper Canada reformer gave as the explanation for the colony's "stupor and inactivity", the debt-slavery which accompanied the colonial "system".

"Our farmers are indebted to our country merchants, our country merchants are deeply bound down in the same manner, and by the same causes, to the Montreal wholesale dealers. Few of these Montreal commission merchants are men of capital; they are generally merely the factors or agents of British houses, and thus a chain of debt, dependence and degradation is begun and kept up, the links of which are fast bound round the souls and bodies of our yeomanry; and that with few exceptions from the richest to the poorest, while the tether stake is fast in British factories."

Like the slogan, "Our Children and our other Domestic Manufactures!", that of Mackenzie at Navy Island: "Freedom of trade — every man to be allowed to buy at the cheapest market and sell at the dearest", expressed the aspirations of the rising manufacturing class, the industrial bourgeoisie. This class could only come to power if the domination of the Colonial Office



and the Family Compact could be broken. Canada in the 1830's was thus the scene of a struggle whose parallel was to be found in the movement for the Reform Bill in England, in the Revolutions of 1830 and '48 on the Continent. That struggle hinged on the decisive question for the contending classes, oppressing and oppressed: Who was to control the machinery of Government? — the question of **State Power**.

In Canada, this question was to be fought out in the struggle for responsible government, for democratic civil and religious liberty, for independent Nationhood.

### Chapter III

## IRRESPONSIBLE GOVERNMENT

VS

## DEMOCRACY

Responsible government, the main demand of the Canadian reform movement, was primarily a means to an end; the breaking of colonial and feudal fetters, to allow the economic expansion of an industrial Canada. In this, the aims of the manufacturing class coincided with the general interests of the mass of the people; the industrial bourgeoisie played the role of a revolutionary-democratic force.

In the next chapter, we shall study the interplay of class forces which preceded the insurrection, and ultimately determined its military defeat. First, however, it is necessary to discuss the political issues around which that class struggle centered: namely the fight for a government responsible to the people, for popular control of the finances, for civil, religious and national freedom.

Whereas the Quebec Act of 1774 had invested all power in the British Governor and a non-elective Legislative Council, the Act of 1791 created in addition, in Upper and Lower Canada, a Legislative Assembly, to be elected by the people. The Legislative Council, its members named by the Crown, was supplemented by a smaller Executive Council, equally non-elective, which was to "assist" the Governor-General and Lieutenant-Governor, stationed in the Lower and Upper province respectively.

So long as there should be complete harmony of



desires between the Governor and his Council on the one hand, and the people's representatives on the other, such a set-up might be expected to function satisfactorily. Just how likely it was for this platonic condition to exist, in view of the situation in the colony, with the power of state in the hands of the Colonial Governor and the Family Compact, must be obvious to anyone. It was quite obvious to Lord Durham, as his Report shows:

"It may fairly be said", he writes, "that the natural state of government in all these Colonies is that of collision between the executive and the representative body.

"When we examine into the system of government in these colonies, it would almost seem as if the object of those by whom it was established had been the combining of apparently popular institutions with an utter absence of all efficient control of the people over their rulers . . .

"It is difficult to understand how any English statesmen could have imagined that representative and irresponsible government could be successfully combined . . .

"From the commencement, therefore, to the end of the disputes which mark the whole Parliamentary history of Lower Canada, I look on the conduct of the Assembly as a constant warfare with the executive, for the purpose of obtaining the powers inherent in a representative body by the very nature of representative government."

In Upper and Lower Canada alike, the main storm-centre of conflict was this irreconcilable contradiction between popular representation and irresponsible administration. In the Lower province, the struggle of

the French Canadian people for national survival gave added impetus to the democratic cause, enriching its content without changing its essential character.

As early as 1809, in the Lower Canada assembly, Pierre Bédard delivered a speech in which he demanded a responsible ministry such as existed in England. This session (like so many others which were to follow) was cut short by the arrival of the Governor, with armed Grenadier Guards at his back, come to pronounce dissolution. Nearly thirty years later, the same demand, "the right to legislate on the inner affairs of the colony" (and have the legislation put into effect), figured at the head of resolutions passed by the stormy mass meetings in Lower Canada which heralded the coming insurrection . . .

At St. Benoit, north-west of Montreal, the following resolution was adopted on April 11, 1836, and reaffirmed at a meeting held a year later, in the same district:

"That the people of this province persevere and is decided to persevere in efforts which it has for long years been making, either directly or through its representatives, in order to obtain a protecting, responsible government, and in particular to insure the control of public revenue raised in the province, by the Commons of the same; **the responsibility of all public functionaries to this same branch of the legislature**; and exercise of the constitutional and legislative authority of the Provincial Parliament over the lands of the country; the replacing of the present Legislative Council by a second body, constituted by the free choice of the people and sharing its interests and sentiments, so as to avoid that in future any attack should be made on public liberty, whether by authorities outside the country,



by ministerial decrees authorizing abuses, monopoly, and bad government, or by means of unjust laws claiming to legislate on the inner affairs of the country".

In Upper Canada, Mackenzie's five-point program, published in 1830, contains the demand for "An administration or executive government responsible to the province for its conduct." The other four points in the program are: Control by the Legislature of provincial revenues; independence of the judiciary; reform of the legislative council; equal rights for each religious denomination, with complete separation of Church and State.

Resolutions passed at mass-meetings here as in the lower province petitioned "that we may see only those who possess the confidence of the people composing the executive council".

Control of State Power, through responsible government, as a means of obtaining Control of the Money-Bags: such was the objective of the Canadian middle class. "The bourgeoisie in the July days," Marx writes, "had inscribed on its banner: *gouvernement à bon marché*, cheap government." Its Canadian counterpart did likewise. A letter of Mackenzie's in 1830, written to Colborne, declares "a cheap, frugal, domestic government" to be the aim of the Reformers; and in Lower Canada the same demand was backed by a reminder that while they had only a fourth of the population of the State of New York, the Governor of the lower province was paid four times as much as the American Governor . . .

The Constitutional Act of 1791 had left open the question of control of the finances. From the beginning, the Assemblies had claimed the right to vote the subsidies, or administrative expenses. In 1806 the Lower Canada Assembly had insisted that "no sum shall be

taken from the Treasury without assent of Parliament or vote of the Assembly"; but the Governors and their Executive Councils had whenever it pleased them, calmly disregarded the votes of the popular assemblies...

Deficits of the Executive were covered by drawing on the local revenue, without bothering to ask for parliamentary approval. If things came to a head, the Governor dissolved the Assembly: a solution which constantly repeated, served only to strengthen the Opposition. When it was discovered, in 1823, that the Receiver General of Lower Canada, Mr. Caldwell, had diverted to his own pocket some £96,000 (a sum equal to two years' revenue of the province), in order to cover his private speculations, the Assembly had an additional argument as to why it should control the subsidies. However, the argument fell on deaf ears. The Executive would not even allow Caldwell to be brought before the courts!

When the Commission sent to Canada in 1835, under Lord Gosford, made its report, Lord John Russell placed before the British parliament a series of resolutions on the Canadian situation. These resolutions included the refusal of an elective Legislative Council and of parliamentary control over finances; they moreover proposed that in case the Assembly in Lower Canada persisted in its demands, the Governor should (as before) seize the revenues without its permission. Their publication in Canada let loose a storm of protest, and was the central theme of the great mass meetings of the summer of 1837. At one of these, held in St. Paul's Market, Quebec City, the denunciation of Russell's resolutions singled out that one in particular, "which must excite universal and virtuous indignation" (so runs the declaration adopted by the meeting); it



was the resolution which "involves a most alarming invasion of the essential rights of taxation and control... The appropriation of the public revenue of Lower Canada without the vote of our representatives is an act of usurpation..." It is not without reason that a contemporary of the 1837 rising describes "the question of finances" as having been a cause of each of the Revolutions in England, in France, and in Canada!

## II

If the British settlers in Upper Canada had been trained by their past history to feel that democratic rights were a traditional necessity, for the French in Lower Canada democracy was the sole guarantee of national survival. The right to independent national existence, "one of the demands of political democracy" (Lenin), was thus interwoven, in Lower Canada, with the demand for responsible government; and it reinforced the struggle, in Canada as a whole, for independence from colonial oppression. It is all the more necessary to insist on the democratic character of the national struggle in Lower Canada, since the present day propagandists of Fascism in Quebec (the historian Abbé Groulx among them), are making every effort to distort the history of 1837 into that of a "race-war" with which Democracy had nothing to do.

Lord Durham's anti-French bias has contributed in a certain measure to obscure the true character of the struggle; but even he admits that racial hatred cannot explain the conflict in Lower Canada. He speaks, significantly, of "the hostility of the races being palpably insufficient to account for all the evils which have affected Lower Canada, inasmuch as nearly the same

results have been exhibited among the homogeneous population of the other provinces."

The national problem of French Canada dates, of course, from the Conquest. The British policy was from the first based on the assumption that the French nationality, language and religious beliefs would rapidly disappear and be replaced by those of the conquerors. However, the rising of the colonies to the south, and the danger of losing Canada as well, brought about a sharp turn in colonial policy, expressed in the concessions of the Quebec Act, in 1774.

"To isolate the inhabitants of the British from those of the revolted Colonies, became the policy of the Government; and the nationality of the French Canadians was therefore cultivated, as a means of perpetual and entire separation from their neighbours. It seems also to have been the considered policy of the British Government to govern its Colonies by means of division, and to break them down as much as possible into petty isolated communities, incapable of combination, and possessing no sufficient strength for individual resistance to the Empire.

"It was part of the same policy to separate the French of Canada from the British emigrants, and to conciliate the former by the retention of their language, laws, and religious institutions."

Durham, however, was of the opinion that this policy was "an error", and condemned the "vain endeavour to preserve a French nationality in the midst of Anglo-American colonies and states." He proposed "the alteration of the character of the Province," by "making it an English population." "Lower Canada must be governed now," runs his Report, "as it must be hereafter, by an English population."



In this, he echoed the sentiment of the Family Compact oligarchy, who failed to appreciate the subtlety of British colonial policy, and saw only before them the immediate problem of "holding down" a subject people. The franco-phobia of the ruling clique as reflected in the newspapers of the period, rises in a crescendo, in proportion as the democratic struggle becomes intense. The "Mercury" writes, early in the century: "After forty-seven years of possession, it is only right that the province should finally become English." Thirty years later, the "Montreal Herald": — "To have peace, we must have solitude. Let us drive the Canadians from the face of the earth . . . The integrity of the empire must be respected, and peace and prosperity assured to the English, even at the expense of the existence of the whole French-Canadian nation."

This pleasant sentiment is typical of the attitude of the ruling class of the time. In Lower Canada, class-prejudice was intensified by national feeling: the oligarchy was a **foreign** oligarchy. With a population of 600,000, compared with 75,000 English, the French Canadians could count 18 functionaries, in a total of 80. One quarter of the judges, in 1834, were French. Papineau addressed himself in these terms to the ruling English:

"We are told: be brothers! Yes, let us be that. But you wish to have everything, power, position, gold. It is this injustice which we cannot tolerate. We demand political institutions which correspond to our social state."

Durham's report describes thus the position of the English ruling class in Lower Canada:

"The circumstances of the early colonial administration excluded the native Canadian from power, and

vested all offices of trust and emolument in the hands of strangers of English origin. The highest posts in the law were confided to the same class of persons. The functionaries of the civil government, together with the officers of the army, composed a kind of privileged class, occupying the first place in the community, and excluding the higher class of the natives from society, as well as from the government of their own country."

The Conquest gave the English landlord-merchants in Lower Canada the position of a ruling class; a number of other factors gave them additional advantages.

The fact that the bourgeois revolution in England had preceded that in France by one hundred and fifty years gave the English middle class a valuable head-start over its continental rivals. This head-start was responsible for the industrial revolution taking place first of all in England. It also enabled that country to defeat its competitors and build up, far in advance of any of them, a vast colonial empire.

The economic power of the English bourgeoisie made possible the defeat of France in the Seven Years' War. It now made possible the economic supremacy of the English in Canada. The exodus of the French seigniorial ruling class, following the Conquest, further contributed to this supremacy. To the privileges of the oppressing, conqueror people, were added the advantages of a more advanced capitalist development. The dice were loaded to a degree which only a fully successful '37 could have overcome; and even the after-effects of the Rebellion, profound as they were, never succeeded in wholly eliminating the lead taken by English Canadian capitalists. Despite the note of complacency, Durham's remarks are correct in substance:



"The active and regular habits of the English capitalists drove out of all the more profitable kinds of industry their inert and careless competitors of the French race . . .

"They have developed the resources of the country; they have constructed or improved its means of communication; they have created its internal and foreign commerce. The entire wholesale, and a large portion of the retail trade of the Province, with the most profitable and flourishing farms, are now in the hands of this numerical minority of the population . . .

"The large mass of the labouring population are French in the employ of English capitalists."

Together with responsible government, with independence from colonial status, the right to independent national existence for the French Canadian people took its place in the demands of the Reform movement.

### III

Today, when democracy is faced with attacks from the forces of disorder on the Right, it is interesting to remember that it was also in the name of Order that our forebears fought for democratic liberty. It was against the disorder and insecurity, the tyranny and violence of the Family Compact régime, that the shafts of the Reformers were directed. Furthermore, when bloodshed came, it was the ruling powers which, by provocation, precipitated it.

The thirty years which preceded the Rebellion witnessed increasing acts of tyranny and repression. The constant dissolutions of the Assemblies, the sublime disregard for the measures they passed (in fifteen years, 325 bills passed by the lower chamber were deposited in the waste basket by the gentlemen of the

Family Compact), were matched by a supreme disregard for individual rights, civil and religious. The "Alien Act" is a typical specimen of the régime: anyone who had not been a resident six months, and who gave rise to suspicion that he was "about to endeavour to alienate the minds of His Majesty's subjects of this Province from his person or government, or in anywise with a seditious intent to disturb the tranquility thereof," was liable to deportation; failure to comply with the order entailed the punishment of death as a common felon.

The following examples indicate sufficiently the kind of rule "enjoyed" by Canadians in this period. In Upper Canada: 1810, persecution and destitution of Judge Thorpe, on account of his opposition to the Family Compact; 1818-19, frame-up, imprisonment and deportation under the Alien Act, of Robert Gourlay; 1826, attack by a gang of upper-class hoodlums on the print-shop of Mackenzie's "Colonial Advocate": 1828, prosecution for "libel" of Francis Collins, editor of the "Canadian Freeman"; 1831, expulsion of Mackenzie from the Assembly on charges of "libel" — this to be followed by six more expulsions in the following years: 1832, attempt on Mackenzie's life in Hamilton, followed by a second attack on the office of the "Colonial Advocate . . ."

In Lower Canada, a similar picture: 1810, the troops raid the office of the Reform paper, "Le Canadien", arresting the printer and two collaborators (all three members of the Assembly) on charges of publishing seditious articles; 1831, imprisonment for libel of the editors of the "Vindicator" and the "Minerve" radical Irish and French papers; 1832, during the election campaign on St. James St., Montreal, the troops



fire on a crowd: three young French Canadians killed; those responsible acquitted by English jury. Finally, the destitutions and arrests, in 1837, which precipitated the armed struggle...

Little wonder that Mackenzie placed democratic order and security as indispensable prerequisites for any future prosperity:

"Under a frugal administration the value of landed estate in Upper Canada will be greatly increased, and the settlement of the country much facilitated, by a numerous and intelligent class of capitalists, who will neither entrust their property nor take up their abode in a land in which the settler is continually liable to be involved in the troubles, attending a struggle for the possession of a government able and willing to protect persons and property, and secure to the community the blessings of civil and religious freedom."

Almost as pressing as the question of civil liberty, was that of religious freedom and the separation of Church and State. As already pointed out, the Church of England had taken possession of the vast clergy reserve lands, and was well on the way to becoming the state church. Non-conformists (of which the Methodists formed the largest body) were denied the right to solemnize marriages or receive a title to lands for chapels or cemeteries. This despite the fact that the mass of the people were non-conformist, while the Church of England was that of the wealthy ruling class. As Durham observed, "The Church, too, for which alone it is proposed that the state should provide, is the Church which, being that of the wealthy, can best provide for itself, and has the fewest poor to supply with gratuitous religious instruction."

It was in the struggle against the establishment

of an Anglican state church (with all which that implied, as regards free, non-sectarian schools and higher education), that lay Egerton Ryerson's main contribution to the democratic cause. Archdeacon Strachan having obtained, in 1827, a charter for a provincial university, whereby all teachers were required to subscribe to the Thirty-nine Articles, the need became evident for a campaign against the sectarian character of the institution, and against the Anglican monopoly of the clergy reserves. Eight thousand people signed a petition circulated by the "Friends of Religious Liberty", a committee of twenty-three, which included Mackenzie, Robert Baldwin, Jesse Ketchum and Ryerson. The last two were the authors of the petition; it asked the British parliament "to leave the ministers of all denominations of Christians to be supported by the people among whom they labour . . . to do away with all political distinctions on account of religious faith — to remove all ministers of religion from seats and places of power in the Provincial Government — to grant to the Clergy of all denominations of Christians the enjoyment of equal rights and privileges in everything that appertains to them as subjects . . . and as ministers of the Gospel, particularly the right of solemnizing Matrimony . . . — to modify the Charter of King's College established at York in Upper Canada, so as to exclude all sectarian tests and preferences—and to appropriate the proceeds of the sale of lands heretofore set apart for the support of a Protestant Clergy, to the purposes of general education and various internal improvements."

The right to education, as a popular, democratic demand, found its place in Reform agitation: and the above petition sufficiently demonstrates the connection



between this question and that of religious freedom. In Lower Canada the Seminary of Quebec and a few classical colleges formed, as it were, islands of clerical culture in a sea of illiteracy and ignorance. Bishop Mountain of Quebec observed: "It is well known that the popular classes in this province are, in general, deplorably ignorant." The seminaries themselves corresponded hardly at all to the needs of the French Canadian middle class. "Le Canadien" in 1836 complained of their inadequacy in the following terms:

"For a long time there have been complaints that the education given in our seminaries does not perfectly correspond to the needs of the century, that it is too much turned towards the study of ancient languages and antiquated theories . . . In a country like ours we need men of business rather than latinists, statesmen rather than churchmen" — a criticism as valid today as it was a century ago.

In Upper Canada, the situation was little better. "The English" wrote Durham, "are hardly better off than the French for the means of education for their children, and indeed possess scarcely any except in the cities." Strachan's "King's College" remained for the time being a project on paper; and Upper Canada College, founded by Sir John Colborne, was an institution of and for the Family Compact.\* The British authorities, as Durham observed, neither did nor attempted to do anything for education. "Indeed", he says, "the only matter in which (the Government) has appeared in connection with the subject, is one by no means creditable to it. For it has applied the Jesuits'

\* The portrait of this Canadian Cavaignac, chief instrument in the crushing of the Rebellion, still hangs in the College prayer-hall, where the present writer sat beneath it, at morning prayers, over a period of some ten years.

estates, part of the property destined for purposes of education, to supply a species of fund for secret service . . ."

## IV

Last, though by no means least in importance among the demands put forward by Canadian democracy, was the question of nationhood, of independence as a state. It was only in the last stages of the pre-Rebellion struggle, and in the course of the conflict itself, that this demand was consciously formulated and put forward. Mackenzie's famous reply to Sir Francis Bond Head's delegation with the flag of truce—"Independence, and a convention to arrange details!"—was a classical expression of it. Another was Chevalier De Lorimier's letter, written on the eve of his execution in Montreal, ending "I meet death with the cry: Vive la Liberté, vive l'indépendance!"

Shortly before the Rebellion, in a letter to the Workingmen's Association of London, the Lower Canada patriots placed as follows the question of secession:

"We have not alluded to a separate independence from the British Crown, but we are not forgetful that the destiny of Continental Colonies severs them from the Metropolitan State whenever the unconstitutional action of a legislative power residing in a distant country is no longer supportable."

In the following year, 1838, with the rising under Nelson at Napierville, the proclamation of the "Provisional Government" declared the people of Lower Canada "absolved from their allegiance to Great Britain, and that the Republican form of Government is best suited to Lower Canada, which is this day de-



clared to be a Republic." Mackenzie had issued a very similar proclamation from Navy Island, shortly before.

There can be little doubt that the independent Republics of Upper and Lower Canada would have achieved some form of union. The bitter opposition of the French Canadians to the Union proposed by the colonial office in 1822, and actually imposed, after the Rebellion, had been due to the realization that its aim was to insure English dominance over them.

Once independence had been achieved, the danger of the imposition of such a union "from above" would have been out of the question; and the warm feeling of solidarity which had prevailed between the two Reform movements would have encouraged a union "from below", to say nothing of the more practical considerations involved — economic and military. The proposal made in Upper Canada, that the popular Convention on taking power should elect delegates to meet with those from Lower Canada, is an indication of the way in which this unity would have been established.

This free Republic of an independent, united Canada was not to be. The defeat of the Rebellion decreed for this country a longer, more round-about path before it should achieve existence as a Nation. But to the Reformers belongs the honour of having first envisioned and fought for a great united Canada. When Durham proposed that the Canadian provinces should be elevated "into something like a national existence," he simply echoed the wish of William Lyon Mackenzie, expressed as early as 1826 in an article entitled: "Confederation"...

## Chapter IV

## CLASS-FORCES IN CONFLICT

On January 23rd, 1836, Sir Francis Bond Head arrived in Toronto to replace Sir John Colborne as Lieutenant-Governor of Upper Canada. As friends in England had suggested to the Reformers that this was a change for the better, (Head, a former Poor Law Commissioner, being supposed to have liberal leanings), the new arrival found himself greeted by placards acclaiming "Sir Francis Head, a Tried Reformer!"

The honorable gentleman treated this tribute with supreme indifference; as he himself pointed out in his "Narrative", "I was no more connected with human politics than the horses which were drawing me — as I had never joined any political party, had never attended a political discussion, and had never even voted at an election."

He was to become "connected with human politics" very speedily in the seething ferment in which the colony found itself in 1836, "split into factions animated by the most deadly hatred to each other". This struggle of "factions" was in reality a struggle between classes. In Canada as elsewhere, these contending classes found their public expression in the formation of political parties, spontaneous and vague at first, later to be more definitely crystallized. The Family Compact oligarchy was represented by the Government or Constitutional Party: the popular forces, by the Reform Party. The economic basis and political aims of these classes and parties we have already glanced at; we must now turn to examine their social complexion.



## I

The ruling class, known in Upper Canada as the "Family Compact", in Lower Canada as "the Oligarchy", formed a kind of commercial-landlord aristocracy, centering around the Governor and the colonial officialdom, and maintained in power with the support of the colonial state apparatus. Its character was thus doubly parasitic: it depended for its power on toadying to the British colonial administrators, and for its wealth, on the toil of the Canadian inhabitants.

Durham described the famous "Compact" as follows:

"For a long time this body of men, receiving at times accessions to its numbers, possessed almost all the highest public offices, by means of which, and of its influence in the Executive Council, it wielded all the powers of government; it maintained influence in the legislature by means of its predominance in the Legislative Council; and it disposed of the large number of petty posts which are in the patronage of the Government all over the Province. Successive Governors, as they came in their turn, are said to have either submitted quietly to its influence, or after a short and unavailing struggle, to have yielded to this well-organized party the real conduct of affairs. The bench, the magistracy, the high offices of the Episcopal Church, and a great part of the legal profession, are filled by the adherents of this party; by grant or purchase, they have acquired nearly the whole of the waste lands of the Province; they are all-powerful in the chartered banks, and, till lately, shared among themselves almost exclusively all offices of trust and profit".

Mackenzie's description of them is similar to Dur-

ham's, if somewhat more colorful and specific; it appears in his "Sketches of Canada and the United States".

"This family connection rules Upper Canada according to its own good pleasure, and has no efficient check from this country to guard the people against its acts of tyranny and oppression. It includes the whole of the judges of the supreme civil and criminal tribunal — active Tory politicians . . . It includes half the executive council or provincial cabinet. It includes the Speaker and other eight members of the Legislative Council. It includes the persons who have the control of the Canada Land Company's monopoly. It includes the president and solicitor of the Bank, and about half the Bank Directors; together with shareholders, holding, to the best of my recollection, about 1800 shares... This family compact surround the Lieutenant Governor, and mould him, like wax, to their will; they fill every office with their relatives, dependants and partisans; by them justices of the peace and officers of the militia are made and unmade; they have increased the number of the legislative council by recommending, through the Governor, half a dozen of nobodies and a few placemen, pensioners and individuals of well-known narrow and bigoted principles; the whole of the revenues of Upper Canada are in reality at their mercy; — they are Paymasters, Receivers, Auditors, King, Lords and Commons!"

Here then, were to be found the antecedents of the "polite society" of a century later.

The minutes of a meeting of the Constitutional Society in Montreal, in 1838, mention names belonging to all of the "best families": "The Honorable Mr. McGill, Chairman of the Association . . . The General Commit-



tee . . . moved by John Molson, Esq., seconded by John Redpath, Esq. . . . The thanks of the meeting . . . moved by James Fraser, Esq." — and so forth. The Hon. Peter McGill had been granted 38,000 acres of land in Lower Canada; he belonged to the class of merchant capitalists whom the fur trade had enriched. Like Sir Allan MacNab (whose "heroic" rôle as Bond Head's right hand man helped to save Toronto from the Rebels), McGill was later to increase his wealth as a railway speculator.

Judge Thorpe, whom we have already mentioned as having at heart the interests, as yet in embryo, of industrial capitalism, described these people as "a shop-keeper aristocracy", the vilest miscreants on earth, who have gorged themselves on the plunder of every Department, and squeezed every dollar out of the wretched inhabitants."

The English Tories had doubtless intended that a merchant-landlord aristocracy should be created in Canada in their own image. In 1800 Lieutenant-Governor Milnes insisted, in a letter to the Duke of Portland, that any constitution granted to the colony "must rest on a due proportion being maintained between the Aristocracy and the Lower Orders of the People, without which it will become a dangerous weapon in the hands of the latter". Sir Francis Bond Head, once he had been jolted into some "connection with human politics", fully shared this opinion. He said of himself, with considerable self-pity, that he had been "sentenced to contend, on the soil of America" with "the low, grovelling principles of Democracy": and affirmed that he would never "surrender to a democratic principle of government . . . so long as the British flag waved in America".

In the Lower province, the situation created by

the Conquest produced a rather complex and peculiar relation of class forces. The existence of fully developed feudal relationships could not but be an obstacle to the mercantile interests of the English conquerors; but at the same time, if the French-Canadian masses were to be held in subjection, an alliance with the French seigneurs and clergy, interested in maintaining feudal tenure, became inevitable. The real aims of the English rulers find expression in a letter of the period: "The feudal system must be broken up and the French language must cease". In practice, however, it was necessary to cement an alliance with the pro-feudal Catholic hierarchy and French land-owners, in order to defeat the democratic forces of the French middle class and peasantry. "A large part of the Catholic clergy," writes Durham, "a few of the principal proprietors of the seigniorial families, and some of those who are influenced by ancient connections of party, support the Government against revolutionary violence."

That it was a somewhat one-sided alliance, is true. No great love was lost between the English Protestant ruling class, and the Catholic hierarchy. Indeed, the latter complained after the Rebellion that "our heroic loyalty has not been recompensed" — despite their having thrown their weight on the side of reaction, and ferociously denounced the Patriots. The support of the French seigneurs was likewise accepted, but ill repaid. Dumont, seigneur at St. Eustache, denounced to the civil authorities the members of the Patriot committee in his district; others of his class played a like rôle. They were none the less excluded from the ruling councils, as is shown by one of the "92 Resolutions" written by Papineau and adopted by the Assembly. The resolution denounces the Legislative coun-



pillors, each in turn: the violent partisan, Chief-justice Jonathan Sewell; receiver-general Hale, who had illegally appropriated sums from the public revenue; Sir John Caldwell, baronet and speculator, who had got away with £100,000 as previously mentioned; Ryland, a well-paid pensioner and place-holder; Matthew Bell, who had illegally got his hands on the lease to the St. Maurice forges (the first iron-works in Canada) and on lands of the Jesuits; John Stewart, commissioner and executive councillor; together with the Honorables, Peter McGill, George Moffat, John Molson, Horatio Gates, Robert Jones and James Baxter, "all born outside of the country, like the preceding, with the exception of two". And last on the list, a lone French name, A. G. Couillard, who got there, it is intimated in the resolution, through his angling for "a minor lucrative office".

These French Canadians who, out of self-interest, openly attached themselves to the Oligarchy were objects of bitter scorn to their compatriots; their number, however, was not great.

Such then, was the make-up of the motley alliance which surrounded the colonial Governor and bent its efforts to defeating the forces of democracy in Lower Canada.

## II

Arrayed against the Family Compact ruling clique were the democratic masses: commercial and industrial middle-class, professionals, farmers and city workers — the Canadian people. It was they who, eighty or a hundred thousand at a time, signed the petitions demanding reform; they, who gathered in the monster mass-meetings in the Richelieu valley, around Montreal, or

in the environs of York: they, who composed the mass-delegations, who invaded the Legislature in Toronto when Mackenzie was illegally expelled from it: they were the Reform movement. —

The all-enveloping sweep of the popular movement for democracy in the Canadas tends to be forgotten or obscured: partly, because "respectable" historians with their ruling-class bias do their best to belittle it; and partly because the actual armed struggle (for reasons which we have yet to discuss), failed to embrace numbers anything like as numerous as those who, in reality, favoured the democratic cause.

The leadership of the Reform movement was in the hands of men of the commercial, industrial and professional middle class. The "Declaration of the Toronto Reformers", drafted in July, 1837, was "written by men who gave the most of their time to politics, and read to men who gave most of their attention to trade and commerce". The committee which met on October 9, 1837, at Doel's house, (on the north-west corner of Bay and Adelaide Streets, in Toronto), and which discussed the project of an insurrection, was composed as follows: a retired ship-owner; a brewer; a grocer "in a good way of business"; an axemaker; a drygoods merchant; a hatter; a master-carpenter; a bookseller and druggist, an attorney, a doctor and a journalist — Mackenzie himself. This is a fair cross-section of the middle-class minority which stood at the head of the democratic movement, demanding freedom to trade, responsible government, civil and religious liberty — in the interests of industrial capitalist expansion. Most of them were concerned enough about property-rights, as their counterparts had been in the French and American bourgeois revolutions. Papineau,



leading the movement which demanded "the establishment of factories and manufactures in our province", declared himself likewise an upholder of property: "I am a great Reformer, insofar as necessary political changes are concerned: but I am a great conservative, so far as the preservation of the sacred right of property is concerned".

Together with the commercial middle class, the professionals played a considerable part in the movement. Rolph, Morrison and the elder Baldwin, in Upper Canada, and Chénier and the two Nelsons, in Lower Canada, were all doctors; Papineau was one among a number of lawyers active in Lower Canada. Among the lower clergy, a section openly sympathized with the Patriots, and one, Chartier, the parish-priest of St. Benoit, helped to build barricades in the streets of St. Eustache. The Methodist preachers in Upper Canada sided with Mackenzie in the early stages of the movement, but broke with him when the conflict began to sharpen.

If the leadership was predominantly a middle-class one, the body and backbone of the movement was to be found in the "yeomen and mechanics," the working people of city and farm. "I have found the main body of the English population," writes Durham, "consisting of hardy farmers and humble mechanics, composing a very independent, not very manageable, and sometimes a rather turbulent democracy". In Lower Canada, "the bulk of the population is composed of the hard-working yeomanry of the country districts, commonly called 'habitans' . . ."

These were the people who trusted and loved Mackenzie, and on whom he depended; it was they who faced Colborne's regulars at St. Denis, St. Charles and

St. Eustache. They were the chief sufferers under feudal oppression in one province, and Family Compact stagnation in the other; and to this was added the bitter hardship of capitalist crisis, then in its first beginnings, but having repercussions in Canada none the less.

The first general capitalist crisis was that of 1825. In 1836-7 there was another, which contributed its share to precipitating the revolutionary struggle, just as that of a decade later brought on the revolutions of 1848. A letter in the "Minerve" of March 13, 1837, describes the effects of the crisis in Lower Canada. Mentioning a report by another correspondent of conditions in Rimouski, the writer exclaims: "If this correspondent . . . were to travel at this moment through the least afflicted district of this Province, he would still see scenes similar to that of which he has given us so passionate a picture. He would come upon a frightful number of families, driven from their homes by hunger, out into the street, going from door to door, besieging rich and poor alike. If he were to enter the houses, he would see, in far greater number than one would imagine, pale and shivering children, asking bread of a mother who has nothing but tears left to offer them, having shared her last crust with them the day previous, while her husband, weakened with hunger, is seeking somewhere for work; but often in vain, for those who formerly employed the poor fear to run short themselves . . ."

"The natural aristocracy of Canada"—that is what Mackenzie called the working people. In his speech to the committee of Reformers, in October, 1837, he refers particularly to "Dutcher's foundry-men and Armstrong's axe-makers" — industrial proletarians — as those "who could be depended on": and it is no accident.



The proletariat, the only completely revolutionary class, was being born in the Canadas. It was not numerous as yet — the obstacles in the path of industrial growth precluded that — but it was none the less the class of those “who could be depended on!” Already, the first trade-unions had been formed: the York Typographical Society, in 1832: the “Mechanics’ Protecting Society of Montreal,” in 1833 . . .

Across the Atlantic, the European proletariat was fighting its first battles, prelude to the June days of 1848. Thus, in 1832 in Paris, a workingmen’s demonstration under the Red flag was attacked by troops, and turned to barricade-fighting. In 1831 and again in 1834, the workers in Lyons arose. At the same time, in England, the first political organizations of the working class were being formed, under the banner of Chartism.

One of these organizations, the Workingmen’s Association of London, sent an enthusiastic message of solidarity to the Canadian Reformers. \* Signed by a dozen workers of different trades — engravers, goldsmiths, carpenters, etc. — the message addresses the Canadians as “friends in the cause of liberty, oppressed brothers,” and greets the resistance opposed by the Patriots to Gosford’s repressive measures. “The cause of democracy”, it continues, “is everywhere triumphant and the career of kindly despotism is ended. You must have your share of the wealth that you accumulate, and of the honours seized on by our enemies . . . Can there be rebellion in a country, when the liberties of a million men are trampled underfoot by a contemptible

\* The reply to this message sent by the Permanent and Central Committee of the Patriots in Montreal, is printed in the Appendix.

invading minority? The time has come when society, its bonds dissolved, returns to the primitive state, placing each man in a position to choose freely for himself the institutions most in harmony with his sentiments, or which guarantee best his life, his work and his possessions . . .

“Brother Canadians, do not let yourselves be deceived by fair promises. Trust in the sacredness of your cause. You have the full approval of your distant brothers. Have faith in your leaders. We augur your triumph.”

In conclusion: “May the sun of independence shine on your growing cities, your joyous hearths, your deep forests and your frozen lakes — such is the ardent wish of the Workingmen’s Association.”

Thus, in its first beginnings, the English proletariat instinctively felt its duty to be one of solidarity with the colonial liberation movement. To the message of the London workers, the Patriot Central Committee in Montreal sent a stirring reply whose conclusion reaffirms the solidarity shown to them: “We desire, through your Association, to proclaim, that whatever course we shall be compelled to adopt, we have no contest with the people of England. We war only against the aggressions of their and our tyrannical oppressors.”

“We have no contest with the people of England”— in that phrase is summed up all the dignity, all the nobility of spirit, of the revolutionary tradition of our Canadian Democracy.

In pitting their strength against that of their colonial and Family Compact rulers, the Canadian people were thus assured of the solidarity of the most advanced section of European democracy: the proletariat. In Canada itself, between the Upper and Lower



Canadian movements there existed the same feeling of fraternal solidarity as the English workingmen had expressed.

—“We wholly approve the patriotic stand taken by the Lower Canadians”, runs a resolution adopted by the Reformers at Pickering, near Toronto: “and, as true Reformers, we consider ourselves the faithful friends of the Patriots in the sister-province!” Resolutions passed at the meetings in Lower Canada greeted in turn the efforts of the movement in the upper province. Papineau affirmed “the indissoluble unity, in the two Canadas, of the popular majorities.” and denounced “the extravagance of those wind-bags who attribute to French antipathies the hate which bursts out against the present régime.” He pointed to “the same phenomenon,” and the “demand of even greater reforms,” in Upper Canada: “There, as in England, the majority of Britons are friends of liberty!”

Placed beside words like these, the attempt by proponents of Fascism in Quebec, to utilize the 1837 tradition for ends of race hatred and isolationist nationalism, seem wretched indeed.

The objective of the Reform movement and of the Rebellion was the establishment of democracy in the interests of the bourgeoisie as a class, as against the old merchant-landlord oligarchy; it was thus, in essence, a “minority revolution”, aiming at the replacement of one minority by another. \* At the same time, however, the middle-class minority could find a battering-ram

\* “All revolutions up to the present day have resulted in the displacement of one definite class rule by another . . . A ruling minority was thus overthrown; another minority seized the helm of state and remodelled the state apparatus in accordance with its own interests”. Engels Introduction to “Class Struggles in France”, p. 14)

for assault on the old régime only in the organized power of the masses of the rural and urban working-people, farmers, artisans and proletariat. In the Canadian struggle, as in the 1848 bourgeois revolution in France, the participation of these masses left its imprint on the program and character of the movement. The demands of the Reformers as incorporated in their “Draft Constitution for the State of Upper Canada”, go beyond the aims of the bourgeoisie. Proclaiming that “Labour is the only means of creating wealth,” clause 56 of the Constitution lays down: “There shall never be created within this state any incorporated trading companies, or incorporated companies with banking powers.” Shortly after the Rebellion, Mackenzie was to declare: “My creed has been — social democracy — or equality of each man before society — and political democracy, or the equality of each man before the law.”

Professor Mackay, in his essay on the political thought of Mackenzie, suggests condescendingly that the latter “hoped by rebellion to establish a frontier Utopia . . . a simon pure democracy of the yeomen and honest country folk of Upper Canada.” The truth of the matter is, that even in the Canadian bourgeois-democratic revolution, the proletariat and farming people, the ruling majority of the future, made their voice heard; and the “social democracy” proclaimed by Mackenzie was the gleam, cast far ahead, of the ultimate democracy of Socialism.

### III

—The unity of the Upper and Lower Canadian movements, and the solidarity of European and American democrats, were a source of strength to the Canadian



cause. A growing disunity within the Reform ranks themselves, however, was a source of fatal weakness which led ultimately to the defeat of the revolution.

This split in the democratic movement made its appearance in the early 1830's; the line of cleavage was that of class-division — the "moderate" or Right wing reflecting the propertied bourgeois interests, the radical Left wing, the popular masses. It was the repetition of the classical split into "Gironde" and "Jacobins," the Marsh and the Mountain, in the great French Revolution. "As a rule," writes Engels, "after the first great success, the victorious minority became divided: one half was pleased with what had been gained, the other wanted to go still further, and put forward new demands, which, to a certain extent at least, were also in the real or apparent interests of the great mass of the people. In individual cases these more radical demands were realized, but often only for the moment; the more moderate party again gained the upper hand, and what had eventually been won was wholly or partly lost again; the vanquished shrieked of treachery, or ascribed their defeat to accident . . .

"All revolutions of modern times, beginning with the great English revolution of the XVIIth century, showed these features, which appeared inseparable from every revolutionary struggle."

These features had appeared in the American revolution, as well as the English and French; Beard, in his "Rise of American Civilization" writes: "Everywhere the supporters of the Revolution were divided into conservative and radical wings, the former composed mainly of merchants and men of substance and the latter of mechanics and yeomen farmers, sometimes led by men of the other group."

This pattern is reproduced in precisely similar form, in the Canadian situation. Dent's "Story of the Upper Canadian Rebellion" clearly reflects the development of the split into Right and Left wings; the fact that the work is a violently partisan defence of the former and a vicious, dishonest attack on Mackenzie and the radicals, is irrelevant in this connection.

In the early thirties, Dent writes, "the Reform Party already began to show symptoms of want of cohesion. The men of moderate views, like the Rolphs, The Baldwins and the Bidwells composed fully two thirds of the entire number. The ultra-Radicals, composed for the most part of unlettered farmers and recently arrived immigrants, showed an inclination to rally themselves under the banner of Mackenzie." Baldwin is described as a man of "exclusive social ideas . . . to whom the little proletarian was altogether distasteful and repulsive." The "little proletarian" is none other than Mackenzie; the tone of sneering contempt pervades the whole of Dent's two gilt-edged volumes, wherever mention is made of the working people. Speaking of the Right wing — Baldwin, Rolph, etc., he says: "the worst symptom of all in their eyes was the ascendancy of Mackenzie and his satellites among the rural and uneducated part of the community." Reference is made to Mackenzie's influence on "the farmers and mechanics."

Finally, the people of Rolph's stamp (in Rolph, says Dent admiringly, "the quality of caution was preternaturally developed"! ) were faced with the choice — either desert to the camp of reaction, or march with the people. As the struggle came to a head, the Right wing "saw the Radical element assuming an importance which as they believed was fraught with far greater



danger to the commonwealth than was likely to arise from the continued ascendancy of the Compact" — so one after another, openly or secretly, according to their situation, they crossed over to the enemy.

In Upper Canada this defection involved an important section of the political leadership, and the main body of the Methodists. During the first stage of the struggle, the latter, interested primarily in religious equality and the separation of Church and State, had played an important role. They had worked with Mackenzie in the "Friends of Religious Liberty"; Egerton Ryerson and Mackenzie had been burned in effigy together, by a Tory mob, as the main leaders of Reform. The Family Compact organ, the "Mercury", had politely referred to Ryerson as "a man of profound hypocrisy and unblushing effrontery, who sits blinking on his perch, like Satan when he perched on the tree of life in the shape of a cormorant to meditate the ruin of our first parents in the garden of Eden". He was, they claimed, the ally of "shameless reprobates" — i.e. of Mackenzie; and the Methodists as a body were denounced just as roundly. The Anglican Bishop of Quebec spoke of "itinerant, and mendicant Methodists; a set of ignorant enthusiasts whose preaching is calculated only to perplex the understanding and corrupt the morals; to relax the nerves of industry, and dissolve the bonds of society ..."

However, with Ryerson's visit to England in 1833, it became apparent that the clerical aims of the Methodist body could be achieved without their further following the Reform movement. The Colonial Office showed itself very obliging, and promised funds for the Methodist seminary — the future Victoria College. The winning over of the Methodists was further facilitated

by the conservative tradition of their body. (John Wesley, says his biographer had been "a Tory and a High Churchman; his High Churchmanship was modified because it interfered with his work, his Toryism was subject to no such strain, and remained unaltered.")

John Ryerson, the staunch Conservative of the family, wrote as follows to his brother Egerton, in 1833: "I have long been of the opinion that we had (both with regard to measures and men) leaned to much toward **Radicleism** and that it would be absolutely necessary sooner or later to disengage ourselves from them **entirely**. You can see plainly that it is not Reform but Revolution they are after, and we would fare **sumptuously, should we not**, with Radcliff, McKenzey, etc. for our rulers."

Later in the year he writes again to Egerton, speaking with satisfaction of the "breaking up of the Union which has hitherto existed between us and the Radicles," and describing the latter as "a banditti of compleat Vagabonds." He complains, significantly enough, that "we have a host of Radicles in our Church" — a fact which was eventually to split that august body itself. Then, returning to the charge, in the same quaint English: "You say you have not chainged your views, etc., but I hope you have in some respects. Although you never was a Radicle, yet have not we all leaned to much towards them and will we not now smart for it a little, but one thing, the sooner the smarts come on the sooner they will be over."

The occasion of the break was the publication by Ryerson of a series of letters in the London Times, in which Hume and the Radicals in England were attacked for their irreligion. Mackenzie replied in kind, and



with considerable violence: the breach was effected. Ryerson's visit to England led him to swing to the Right. Mackenzie's visit, in the same year, had the very opposite effect. From the fall of 1833 dated his conviction ("I have seen the usage Ireland met with") that only a break with England would "rid us of the system which binds us to the earth."

Meanwhile, the Rolphs, the Baldwins and the Bidwells were joined by the Methodist leaders. "The high party are looking to the Methodists to save the country," one of them wrote, in 1836. As events proved, they did their share of what was expected of them...

In Lower Canada, a parallel process had taken place. Papineau found the Neilsons, Parents and others drawing away from him, as the struggle grew more arduous. In the session of 1833 they voted against him in the Assembly. The occasion of the breach had been the demand of Papineau and the Left wing that the churchwardens (named by the parish priests and administering with them the business affairs of the church) should be elected by the parishioners. The Moderates, under the influence of the Hierarchy, opposed the idea, and gradually, on other issues, the breach widened.

This split in the ranks of the movement, an inevitable accompaniment of every bourgeois revolution, was largely responsible, as we shall see, for the armed struggle following the path it did.

## Chapter V

## TOWARDS CIVIL WAR

The decade 1827-37 was one of those periods in which it is possible to observe, step by step, the gradual accumulation of tension between contending classes, which finally can only be resolved in revolution. Little by little, goaded on by oppression and provocation, ever broader masses of the people are drawn into political activity; and as the contest sharpens, a crisis develops and deepens among the ruling class, the vacillation of the hesitating, intermediary elements increases, and, given organization and leadership, the revolutionary class finds itself finally with power within its grasp. This is the pattern which the Canadian scene presented in those years. Instead of the conventional, history-book myth of a rebellion artificially engineered by a few malevolent agitators, (a slander which Dent repeats — "Mackenzie and he only was the originator of the Rebellion... his ill-balanced brain, inflamed by hatred," etc. etc.) — the reality presents a very different aspect. It is that of a conflict rooted in "the very composition of society," working itself out by an almost organic process, a struggle of classes moving towards an inevitable, violent solution. The momentum was that of the forward-pressing forces of social production; the obstacle, the organized forces of social privilege and decay. The Reform Party incarnated the one, the Compact oligarchy, the other.

"Who are the insensate men," asked Papineau in 1827, in his "Address to the Electors of Lower Canada", "who wish to halt the natural and inflexible course of



events? A small, a very small number of men among us wish to disfigure this magnificent creation of Providence, destroy its benefits, and causing the triumph of their despotic principles, establish the serfdom and political degradation of a whole people . . . ”

It was that year that Dalhousie, the Governor, prorogued the Lower Canada assembly two days after its opening, rather than recognize Papineau as Speaker of the House. The struggle between the Assembly and the Executive had then been under way, with scanty interruptions, for twenty years.

After the dissolution, Waller, the editor of the "Spectator" and a friend of Papineau's, was arrested. Other papers were prosecuted; judges were removed from office; the French Canadian battalions of militia were dissolved. Petitions to London, protesting against the reign of terror, were circulated. No less than eighty-seven thousand people affixed their signatures thereto. Once more the Governor was changed, his successor, Kempt, being instructed to calm the agitation, but to yield nothing. Kempt was in his turn replaced by Aylmer, who offered negligible concessions, hedged about with vague promises; and then had the two leading Patriot journalists arrested — Tracey, of the "Vindicator," Duvernay, of the "Minerve". The elections of that year — 1832 — witnessed the bloody fusillade by the troops on St. James St., Montreal. Those responsible for the deaths of three young French-Canadians faced trial, were acquitted, received the congratulations of the Governor . . .

Two years later, the Assembly adopted the "92 Resolutions" a charter of rights and an indictment of the colonial oligarchy. In the same year, 80,000 signed a petition opposing the chartering of the British Land

Company, an anti-French-Canadian enterprise launched by London speculators.

From this time on, provocation follows provocation as the authorities feel their position weakening. On June 4, 1834, the troops fire on a peaceful assembly on the Champ de Mars, in Montreal. The rumour is spread, that 10,000 Patriots are about to march on the city. Regiments are ordered to stand by, two pieces of artillery parade in the streets.

Meanwhile, the English party, impatient with these hesitating measures of the authorities, constitute armed organizations of their own: the "Carabineers", whom the Governor, under popular pressure, is forced to declare illegal. They promptly reconstitute themselves under the name of the "British Legion", and later, also, the "Doric Club". Advertisements appear, announcing a

#### "Canadian" shooting-match:

Notice: A plaster figure representing a certain great agitator, to serve as bulls-eye. A prize to be awarded to the sharpshooter who at 50 yards distance hits the head of the said personage. Members of the British Legion or the Doric Club are respectfully requested to hold themselves in readiness".

Etienne Parent's paper, the "Canadien", warned the Patriots early in 1836 of the danger that the forces of the Right might precipitate bloodshed:

"Judging from the well known character of the factious elements, who are threatening the country with civil war, and in the light of circumstances which are well known, there is every reason to believe that they are continuing to organize, but in secret, despite



the order of the Governor and the laws. At the most unexpected moment they will spring upon their victims and plunge the country into tears and mourning, if the people are not ready to oppose them with a force sufficient to repel them and oblige them to observe law and order".

"Le Canadien" bestowed on the forces of Reaction the identical epithet that the Spanish people of a century later were to apply to the fomentors of civil war in their country: "les factieux" — "los facciosos" . . .

A parallel development, in these ten years, was taking place in Upper Canada. Whereas Dalhousie had dissolved the Assembly rather than recognize Papineau as Speaker, the Family Compact party engineered the expulsion of Mackenzie on trumped-up charges of "libel". A delegation of nine hundred and thirty people went to Government House to protest. His Excellency, having protected himself and his residence with loaded cannon, gave the delegation the satisfaction of the following reply: "Gentlemen, I have received the petition of the inhabitants".

The following year, 1832, an unsuccessful attempt was made on Mackenzie's life. Having been again re-elected, after this third expulsion, Mackenzie was followed to the Assembly by a large crowd of his supporters; at an attempt to expel him anew, they invaded the Chamber.

The petitions passed by the popular meetings began to take on a tone of exasperation. One, adopted at Whitby, contained a note of warning: "Loyal as the inhabitants of this country unquestionably are, your petitioners will not disguise from your Excellency that they consider longer endurance, under their present oppressions, neither a virtue nor a duty."

In 1834 an election took place, returning a majority for the Reformers. Mackenzie was thus enabled to have the "Report of the Committee on Grievances" adopted and forwarded to London. Like the 92 Resolutions, this document analyzed the ills of the colony and demanded responsible government and an elective Legislative Council, or upper Chamber. The Colonial Office replied in its instructions to the new lieutenant-governor, Bond Head, refusing to grant the demands.

When a delegation came to him, sent by a meeting of the Reformers in Toronto, Sir Francis spoke of them condescendingly as being "principally from the industrial classes", and explained to them his reply would be couched "in plainer and more homely language" than he would ordinarily use. The delegates answered with considerable sarcasm, then reiterated their demand — "cheap, honest, and responsible government".

In 1836 Bond Head arbitrarily dissolved the Assembly, and in the election which ensued, threw himself and all the forces at his command into the campaign. Threats, intimidation at the polls, gangsterism on a scale since grown familiar but then unheard of, combined to give Sir Francis his desired majority.

A commission of inquiry, headed by Lord Gosford, made its report in the spring of 1837. It contained the familiar apparent concessions combined with real refusal of the main demands of the Reformers. Papineau referred to the Commissioners with a minimum of respect; their Report he christened "the book of the three impostors" — and went on to say, "two of them are ignorant; the third is learned, but his head is slightly cracked". On the basis of the report Lord John Russell categorically rejected the idea of responsible government, and had resolutions passed by Parliament



authorizing the seizure of revenues by the Executive in Lower Canada, despite the opposition of the Assembly.

The news of Russell's resolutions was the last straw. A storm of indignation broke loose in the Lower province, meeting after meeting being held to protest against the Colonial tyranny. Mackenzie and the Upper Canada Reformers pledged their support to the Patriots in the struggle against "Coercion" . . .

The tide was rising. Both in Lower and Upper Canada, the authorities and the Compact calmly envisaged the possibility of civil war, as the sole means of ending once for all the opposition of the people. In Montreal, Colborne, now in charge of the armed forces of the colony, was organizing troop-movements without the Governor's knowledge, and intriguing with the ruling faction. He was insistent that the troops be sent into action before the Patriots should become too powerful. His insistence was to carry the day, and unleash civil war.

In Toronto, the fatuous Bond Head was playing his role of a titled provocateur. "I considered", said he afterwards, "that if an attack by the rebels was inevitable, the more I encouraged them to consider me defenceless, the better".

Meanwhile, in this atmosphere of terror and provocation, the masses of the Canadian people were organizing, closing their ranks . . .

## II

As far back as 1827, the people of Lower Canada had begun to create a network of parish and regional committees, charged with the task of organizing meet-

ings, the adoption of resolutions, and the sending of petitions. In the course of time these popular committees were to take on the aspect of organs of revolutionary power: the embryo, within the old state, of the new Democracy . . .

In 1834, the local committees, hitherto leading a somewhat perfunctory existence, were brought under a unified leadership, with the formation of a "Permanent and Central Committee" in Montreal. The Central Committee was composed of deputies from the parish or county committees. These in their turn were to hold annual conventions, to adopt resolutions, formulate plans of work, arrive at organizational decisions. The committee of Two-Mountains county, north-west of Montreal Island, held conventions in 1835, '36 and '37. It is interesting to notice that the committee elected at the last convention includes names such as Phelan, Ryan, Purcell, Hawley, Hills and Watts — in addition to the majority of French-Canadians.

At the meeting of this committee, held on August 13, at St. Benoit, a petition is received from Mme. Girouard who has organized "a group of women to adopt resolutions with the aim of contributing insofar as the weakness of their sex permits, to the success of the patriotic cause". The committee endorsed the petition and authorized the formation of the "Association of Patriot Women of Two Mountains County". The minutes of the same meeting mention the "Papineau penny" — a contribution by each member of the local organizations towards the organizational fund.

— The repressive measures of the authorities included the removal of judges who were French Canadian or who showed signs of liberal sympathies; and the dismissal of militia officers guilty of the same crimes.



French Canadian regiments had already been dissolved under Dalhousie's régime.

It was in reply to these measures that the Patriot committees proceeded, first in one locality, then in others, to constitute their own judiciary, militia, and administrative apparatus. In this way they not only replaced officials whom the Governor had dismissed, but began to lay the basis for municipal and local administrations which the colony had hitherto lacked. Lower Canada at the time of the Conquest, Durham reported, had had only two institutions which "preserved the semblance of order and civilization in the community — the Catholic church and the militia . . . Lower Canada remains without municipal institutions of local self-government, which are the foundations of Anglo-Saxon freedom . . . The most defective judicial institutions remain unreformed . . ." And as to the relations between the provinces, "the various Colonies have no more means of concerting . . . common works with each other, than with the neighbouring States of the Union. They stand to one another in the position of foreign States, and of foreign States without diplomatic relations".

These defects, the Reformers themselves set about remedying, and the more industriously as the decisive struggle approached. At a meeting in Quebec city, in the summer of 1837, the following methods of resisting oppression were resolved upon:

"The diffusion of general education, and of political knowledge, preference for native products and domestic manufactures, and the regular organization of the people by parishes, townships and counties". And further, "that a Correspondence Committee be formed

to establish relations with the other parts of the country . . ."

Meeting at St. Benoit, in October, the Permanent Committee of Two-Mountains county decided to set up their own judiciary and militia organizations, "making usage of the authority confided to it by the people". The resolution to this effect states that the Governor, by removing arbitrarily "a great number of respectable citizens, who fulfilled with integrity and to the satisfaction of the people the charges of magistrates and officers of militia", had thus "put the inhabitants of the country to the necessity of taking measures for the protection of peace and order, particularly in the localities which are wholly deprived of these officers, and where the inhabitants would be obliged, in order to obtain justice, either to travel a great distance or else address themselves to officers who only owe their nomination to their antipathy toward the mass of the inhabitants".

It was resolved that the people of the parishes concerned were to meet two weeks later, on a Sunday afternoon, and elect "three or more wise and discreet persons" in each parish, as justices of the peace. All differences between Reform sympathizers were to be brought before these people's magistrates: in case of an appeal, the decision of the Permanent Committee of the county would be final. Any Reformer who refused to abide by the decision of the elected judge, jury or Permanent Committee, or who had recourse to the reactionary tribunals, was liable to the following disciplinary measures: loss of his right to vote or be elected at Reform meetings; and, if a member of committees, removal therefrom; a censure by the committee "to be announced publicly at the gate of the parish church . . .



and of the churches of the neighbouring parishes"; and lastly, "he who is thus dishonored" was to be treated by all Reformers as an enemy of the community, everyone "strictly abstaining from any relationship whether friendly or commercial" with him.

The militia officers removed by the Governor because of their patriotism were to be re-elected by those who in each parish had formed a corps of militia. These latter were to be drilled in "the exercise of arms and light troop-movements". All reports of militia registration were to be forwarded to the Central Committee, which undertook to obtain arms and equipment.

Thus the Committees began to assume the character of organs of State-power, combining the functions of political leadership, and judicial and military administration. In the course of the armed conflict they were to take officially the name: "Provisional Government".

It is important, at this point, to insist on the fact that the Reformers at this time, and indeed up to the last moment, had no clear intention and had made no plans, for starting an armed struggle. While fully conscious that a crisis was approaching, they were resolved to leave to their oppressors the rôle of the Party of Violence. At the most, the Patriots would defend themselves if attacked; and this attitude, as we shall see, gave their struggle a purely defensive character, once the storm broke.

Three years before the outbreak, Papineau accused the ruling party of being the fomentor of violence: "The reform Party has committed no violence. It was in its interest that none should be committed. The servile party from the first had an interest in violence being committed; this interest became each day more pressing, and each day the violence became greater".

Two years earlier, the "Christian Guardian" in Upper Canada told the same story:

"The disorder which disgraces those meetings of late has in no instance originated with the yeomanry or mechanics of the country, but with a few poor ignorant men of turbulent dispositions . . . prepared for, and led on to the work by interested individuals who seem to be much alarmed at any attempt to correct abuses . . ."

After the Rebellion, Papineau wrote, in his "History of the Insurrection", that the Government had "begun a civil war against a people who had not provoked it, who had not been urged on such a course, who did not desire it when it did break out . . . I affirm that none of us had prepared, desired, or even foreseen armed resistance".

The crisis began to develop with the arrival of the news of Russell's coercive measures. At the meeting at Saint-Laurent, on May 15, Papineau declared, however, that the Reformers would resist only under provocation: "If they advance one step in the road of illegality and injustice, let us move forward, one step equal and more rapid, in that of resistance". At the same time he insisted on a boycott of imported British goods as the weapon of resistance.

Throughout the summer, the meetings of the Reformers were held in the utmost calm and discipline. The troops of Colborne were to be the ones to precipitate the conflict.

— It was to be the outbreak of civil war in the valley of the Richelieu which called the Reformers in Upper Canada to arms, in fulfilment of their repeated pledges of support.

Here, the unconstitutional rôle of Bond Head in



the 1836 elections had somewhat the same effect as Russell's measures of Coercion in Lower Canada: it created a feeling of despair, and the conviction that only by their own action could the people achieve anything.

The "Declaration of the Toronto Reformers", drafted at the end of July, 1837, called for a Convention of the people, "to take into consideration the political condition of Upper Canada, with authority to its members to appoint commissioners, to meet others to be named on behalf of Lower Canada and any other colonies, armed with suitable powers as a congress to seek an effectual remedy for the grievances of the colonists".

The same meeting adopted a plan "for uniting, organizing and registering the Reformers of Upper Canada as a political union". From the beginning of August until December, two hundred meetings were held throughout the province; the Toronto declaration was read and adopted, and committees — one hundred and fifty of them — set up, under the jurisdiction of the Central Committee, whose secretary was Mackenzie. At the same time, some seventy delegates were elected to the proposed Convention. A mass march on Toronto was planned, as a demonstration to coincide with the Convention and back up its demands. As in Lower Canada drilling and a rudimentary military organization of the people were under way; but it was not until November that an organized seizure of power was contemplated — and even then, everything justified Mackenzie's assumption that this could be carried out without bloodshed.

On November 13, Papineau left Montreal at the insistence of friends who feared for his life, on which

an attempt had already been made. Immediately, Colborne persuaded the Governor to issue warrants for the arrest of the leading Patriots, and to authorize the troops to carry out the arrests. The ill-armed Patriots gathered in the towns and villages to defend their leaders: the troops were marched against them.

The civil war in the Canadas had begun.



## Chapter VI

### THE ARMED STRUGGLE

"We took up arms not to attack others, but to defend ourselves".  
"We belong to our country, and make the willing sacrifice on the altar of her liberties".

— Letter of eight Patriot prisoners  
to Lord Durham, June 18th, 1838.

#### I

The mass movement of protest against Coercion in Lower Canada, which had risen to a new pitch of intensity with the meetings in May, reached its climax in the great rally of the Six Counties on October 23, at Saint Charles, on the Richelieu. Five thousand people gathered to hear Wolfred Nelson, Girod, Papineau. A pole topped by a phrygian bonnet, symbol of the Republic, together with the tricolor flag, dominated the assembly. Even at this time Papineau continued to counsel the boycott as the main means of resistance. Wolfred Nelson, and others with him, believed that an armed struggle could no longer be avoided.

The lines of cleavage had been growing ever sharper, between friends and enemies of the people. "With few exceptions", writes one historian, "none of the clergy, the nobility, the merchants, or the upper bourgeoisie, sided with the Patriots". There remained: the petty-bourgeoisie, the artisans and "mechanics", the peasantry — in short the People. In May, Papineau had already sensed the coming crisis:

"The times to prove men are arrived. Such times are of great use to the people. They teach them how

### THE ARMED STRUGGLE

to distinguish those who are fairweather patriots, whom the first stormy day disperses . . . from those who say, "In good and bad fortune, we are for the people; if they be ill-treated, we shall not remain aloof; we shall defend them at every risk; we contend for principles, and if these are violated we will maintain them against any authority whatsoever, so long as our hearts beat, so long as our lips can pronounce the truth!"

In August, Lartigue, the Catholic bishop of Montreal, ordered the priests to refuse absolution to any who preached resistance to "the government under which we have the happiness to live". The day after the meeting at St. Charles, he issued a manifesto in favour of the authorities and against the Patriots: it included a scathing denunciation of Democracy. "Do not let yourselves be seduced by people who try to engage you in rebellion against the established Government, on the pretext that you belong to the Sovereign People . . ."

The Church owed its established position to the people's movement, the fear of which had led to the concessions of the Colonial Office to the French Canadian clergy; but the upper hierarchy unhesitatingly placed itself on the side of Reaction.

Yet despite this, when a price was set on the heads of Papineau, Nelson and others, hundreds flocked to the Patriot banner, ready to give their lives rather than allow the oppressors to "move one step further in the path of illegality and injustice".

#### II

Having once decided to crush the popular movement before it should become irresistible, the author-



ities in Lower Canada embarked on an organized military campaign. The commander-in-chief, Colborne, had fought Napoleon in Egypt, in Spain, and at Waterloo; in this last battle, he is reputed to have played a decisive role, by taking upon himself, at a crucial moment, to turn the flank of the Imperial Guard. His lieutenants and the men under them were seasoned veterans. Within a very short space of time, he had 6,000 men under his orders, ready to be launched against an unprepared, ill-armed, scattered Patriot militia. The Tory press congratulated the Commander-in-Chief on his efficiency and foresight; there was little of the surprising in it, however, when one remembers that he had for weeks been fuming with impatience, disposing his forces, waiting for the order to march . . .

Finally Gosford, under pressure from the English tory party, consented to act: and the military operations commenced.

The two main centres of the people's movement were the Richelieu valley, (where the proximity of the United States had always acted as a democratic stimulus) and Two-Mountains county. Colborne's strategy aimed at crushing the Patriot forces in one area, and then, before the other should become over-dangerous, attacking it in turn. Had the Patriots been prepared to go on the offensive, organizing a rising in Montreal and marching on the city from Two-Mountains and the Richelieu — i.e. from the west and the east, simultaneously — it would have been a very different matter. As it was, their struggle was almost wholly a defensive one — a fact which enormously facilitated Colborne's task. It transformed his position in Montreal from that of a general caught between two fires, into that of one commanding an inner strategic base of operations

against two divided and waiting enemy forces: a position which his old adversary, Bonaparte, had so frequently used to good advantage.

As Papineau, after leaving Montreal, had gone to St. Denis on the banks of the Richelieu, and as the majority of the Patriot leaders were in that area, Colborne decided that this should be the scene of the first phase of the campaign.

The main body of the Patriots had concentrated their forces in the villages of St. Denis and St. Charles, situated six miles apart on the Richelieu. The pincers-movement which they and the forces in Two-Mountains had failed to employ against Colborne, he proceeded to employ against them. Colonel Gore was sent down the St. Lawrence to Sorel, whence his troops were to march south, along the bank of the Richelieu, against the Patriot concentration; Colonel Wetherall crossed over to Chambly, from which point he was to advance, from the opposite direction to Gore, on St. Charles. This converging movement was intended to allow, at the same time, the "mopping-up" of any Patriot forces which might be encountered en route: notably, at St. Ours, above Sorel on the Richelieu, and at Longueuil, where two arrested Patriots had been freed by a handful of militiamen, and a detachment of regular cavalry put to flight.

Gore reached Sorel on November 22nd. He left here the same day at ten at night, in the midst of a chill, heavy down-pour of rain. Under him were five companies of fusiliers, and a detachment of cavalry with one field-piece. At dawn, after an exhausting march rendered more difficult by a muddy detour in order to avoid St. Ours, the troops were still some miles from St. Denis.



Here, preparations for the defence were in full swing. Wolfred Nelson, in command of some eight hundred Patriots, had been warned of Gore's approach by a happy accident. A messenger from Montreal with despatches for the commandant at Sorel, having arrived after the latter had left with Gore for St. Denis, followed post-haste; but not taking the same detour as the troops, arrived before them, in time to give an involuntary warning to the Patriots.

On arriving in the outskirts of St. Denis Gore decided to proceed at once to the attack; having no very high opinion of the calibre of his adversaries, the veteran of Waterloo did not so much as bother to rest his troops. Dividing them into three detachments, he sent one toward the wood east of the village, another along the river bank to the west, and the main column, with the cannon, along the high road into the centre of the village.

The Patriots, of whom only about a hundred were armed with old flint-lock rifles, the rest having nothing but scythes and pitch-forks, had barricaded themselves, some in the stone house of the Saint-Germains, on the high-road, the rest in neighbouring buildings. Those without firearms massed behind the walls of the church, ready to participate in the engagement at the first favorable opportunity. Papineau, who had remained until the last moment, had been prevailed upon by Nelson to retire to the safety of St. Hyacinthe.

For six hours the British troops attempted to carry the village by storm: they were met by a withering, deadly fire. After attacking in the open, where their red coats provided an excellent target, the troops entrenched themselves behind fences and wood piles. Gore, furious at being held at bay by a handful of

"peasants", ordered one detachment, under Capt. Markham, to turn the flank of the Patriots at all costs. Three times the troops charged, without success. The third time Markham was killed; the men had no sooner retreated once more, when they were attacked unexpectedly by a body of Patriots, a hundred or so in number, who had come to join Nelson, from St. Ours and the neighbouring villages. They were joined by the force which had been stationed at the church. Before the combined assault, Gore's troops began to yield ground, and showed signs of becoming demoralized.

The veteran of Waterloo ordered the retreat — a retreat as undignified as it was humiliating, as the cannon was captured in the course of it, as well as a number of men.

Like wild-fire, the news spread over the countryside: the Patriots had put British regulars to rout! Gore had lost sixty casualties, half of them killed, and his field-piece. The Patriots lost twelve killed, four wounded.

Meanwhile, Colonel Wetherall was advancing on St. Charles with six companies of infantry, a detachment of cavalry and two pieces of artillery. At St. Charles, the Patriots were commanded by T. Storrow Brown, a young liberal of loyalist descent, and one of those for whose arrest a warrant had been issued. Of a nervous temperament, and recovering from a wound received in a recent skirmish with the Doric Club, Brown was far less suited than was Nelson, to command a Militia in battle.

Together with his men, who were about as short of arms as those at St. Denis had been, Brown took up a position in the stone manor-house of the seigneur, Debartzch (one of those who had deserted to the side



of reaction). It would have been hard to find a place more ill-suited for defence against a well-equipped force, armed with artillery. The house stood at the river's edge, and was overlooked by a hill close by. From the hill, the encampment was at the mercy of the artillery; and in addition, there was no avenue of retreat, as they had the river at their backs. To make matters worse, chance, which had brought Nelson a messenger from Colborne to warn him of Gore's approach, now worked in the opposite direction. A courier despatched to order Wetherall to retreat on Montreal (news of Gore's rout having reached head-quarters) was intercepted on the road by a group of Patriots; so, instead of withdrawing, and thus inevitably rousing the Patriots' enthusiasm and perhaps leading them to take the offensive, Wetherall continued his advance with a well-equipped and fresh force of troops. At the first discharge of artillery-fire, T. S. Brown, who was reconnoitering, fled in the direction of St. Denis, leaving his two hundred men leaderless and occupying an impossible tactical position in the face of an overwhelming enemy.

The first return-fire of the Patriots disconcerted the troops; but once the artillery had demolished the improvised fortifications, Wetherall hurled his main force in a bayonet-charge against the defenders. In fierce hand-to-hand fighting, the Patriots were overpowered and butchered. A few managed to escape; about forty were killed, the rest wounded or captured; The troops reported only three killed and eighteen wounded; but there is reason to believe that this was an under-statement.

Five days later, on November 30, Gore returned to St. Denis and avenged his defeat of the week before;

he had every house in the village, with the exception of two, burned to the ground.

Papineau, O'Callaghan, Duvernay and other Patriot leaders, meeting on the American border, decided that so long as the North had not been put down, it was necessary to create a diversion in the South which would prevent Colborne from throwing his whole force against the Patriots in Two-Mountains. Accordingly, a force of eighty was organized and moved in the direction of St. Cesaire, whither Nelson had retreated.

At Moore's Corners, close to the frontier, they were met by a force of four hundred volunteers, and, after a brief struggle, had to retreat.

Thus ended the first phase of the conflict.

It was now the turn of the North, and Two-Mountains . . .

### III

As in the Richelieu valley, the Patriots north-west of Montreal gathered to defend their leaders, threatened with arrest. These were, at St. Benoit, Girouard and Masson; at St. Eustache, Dr. Chénier and the Swiss, Girod.

On December 5th, Gosford proclaimed martial law in the district of Montreal. Colborne had already begun to concentrate his forces for the expedition in the north. With the Patriots wholly on the defensive, and their movement crushed on the south of the St. Lawrence, there was reason to believe that the concentrations of Patriot forces at St. Benoit and St. Eustache would fall away of themselves. But Colborne had no intention of abandoning his campaign. To the beacon-



fires of devastated villages set alight by the forces of Gore and Wetherall, were to be added a new chain of fires in Two-Mountains. The object was not merely to defeat the hated "rebels", but to exterminate them. Girouard, writing from the Montreal Prison in April, 1838, bears witness to the fact:

"It had been decreed by the authorities that the imposing forces which made up the expedition against the Canadians in the county of Two-Mountains were not intended simply to take possession of the leaders of the so-called revolt or rebellion, but actually, to root out utterly the patriotism in the county, with fire, sword and pillage, among all our brave blue-bonnets..."

Colborne's strategy in this expedition was essentially a repetition of that employed in the first phase of operations. As his points of concentration he chose Carillon, on the left bank of the Ottawa, just above the point where it meets the Lake of Two-Mountains: and St. Martin, on Jesus Island, north of Montreal. The force at Carillon would move east, that at St. Martin, west, to effect a junction at St. Benoit, midway between the two. St. Benoit and St. Eustache would be caught between two fires, in the same manner as St. Denis and St. Charles.

At Carillon, Major Townshend, with two companies of regulars, was charged with the command of the numerous English volunteers who had been rallying to the Government standard. They formed fifteen companies totalling close to 1,000 men. By December 10, Townshend had altogether 1,500 men under his command. On receiving the order from Colborne, four days later, to march on St. Benoit, he enrolled another four to five hundred Government supporters.

The regular troops would have more than sufficed,

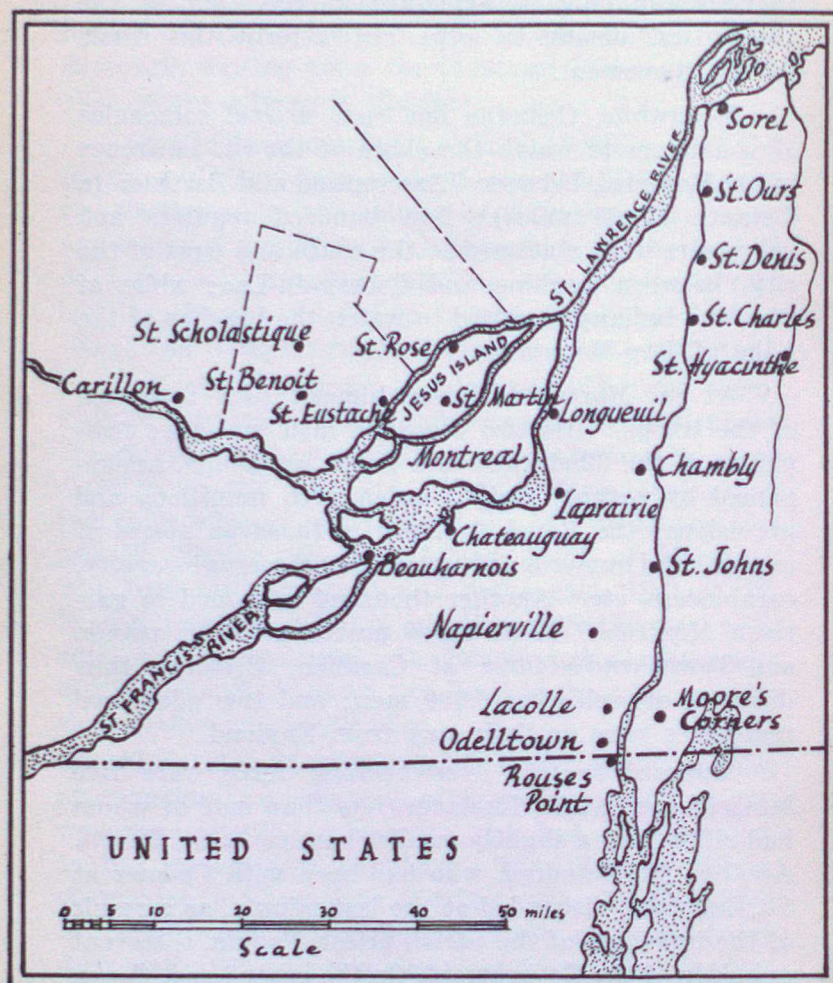
under the circumstances, to take St. Eustache and St. Benoit. The arming of hundreds of fanatical anti-Patriots can only be explained in the light of the authorities' desire to wipe out utterly the whole Patriot movement.

Meanwhile, Colborne had sent several companies of volunteers to watch the shore of the St. Lawrence below Montreal, between l'Assomption and Berthier (a distance of 25 miles); five hundred regulars and volunteers were stationed to the south and west of the city, between Lachine and Coteau-du-Lac; while at Oka, the Indians promised to watch the beaches of the Lake of Two-Mountains.

At St. Martin, Colborne himself took command of the troops. His two thousand men included: companies of the 32nd, 83rd and Royal regiments, accompanied by seventy sleighs laden with munitions and provisions; the Royal Artillery, with seven pieces of cannon; and numerous volunteer detachments—cavalry, carabineers, etc. Another thousand remained to garrison Montreal. With those posted at other points, and Townshend's force at Carillon, Colborne thus disposed of well over 6,000 men; and two additional regiments were on their way from England.

Opposed to this overwhelming force were five hundred men at St. Eustache, less than half of whom had rifles; and a slightly smaller number at St. Benoit. Another five hundred, who had been with Chénier at St. Eustache, disbanded at the last minute, as a result of the instances of the parish priest, Paquin, a fervent upholder of the Government. On the other hand, Canon Chartier, priest of St. Benoit, was an enthusiastic Patriot. The priest at St. Charles had given the Patriots his blessing; Chartier went further, and worked





with the Patriot command, helping to raise barricades and fortifications and encouraging the men in the Patriot camps.

By December 10, both St. Eustache and St. Benoit were fortified. The Patriots now proceeded to await the arrival of the enemy. It was only on the 13th that the leaders decided, after a council of war, to march on the army at St. Martin, and attempt a surprise attack on the night of the 14th-15th. At this time Girod and Chénier, at St. Eustache, could still count on about a thousand men. A surprise night attack, in the heavy snow which had fallen in the last few days, would have presented difficulties, but had the possibility of success.

However, they had waited too long. On the morning of the 14th, Colborne with his 2,000 men moved out of St. Martin, crossed the river, above St. Rose, and advanced on St. Eustache. A small body of volunteers, under Globenski, seigneur of St. Eustache, took the shorter route, across Jesus island to the point across the river from the village.

The first warning which the Patriots received was a fusillade, on the morning of the 14th, from across the river. It was Globenski and his volunteers. Chénier, with a hundred and fifty men, started across the ice to the attack. Suddenly, a cannon shot, fired from the shore which the Patriots had just left, brought them to a halt. Turning, they saw the main body of Colborne's troops, stretching for two miles along the road which skirts the river bank, their bayonets gleaming in the cold December sunlight. The Patriot ranks broke in confusion, scattered. Chénier regained the village in haste and began posting his men in the church and the surrounding houses.



To judge from the manner in which Colborne approached St. Eustache, it would seem that the courage of the Patriots of St. Denis had made some impression on Wellington's veterans. Before even attempting to enter the village, he subjected it to a furious artillery bombardment; and the same time disposed his forces of infantry in a vast semi-circle, some three miles long, around the outskirts, and well out of range of patriot bullets.

For a full hour the bombardment of the helpless village continued. At one o'clock in the afternoon, an artillery detachment was sent a little way up the street facing the Church. For another hour the cannonade continued, now concentrated chiefly on the main stronghold — the Church itself.

By now, the infantry began to move forward; a part took up a position on the frozen surface of the river; other detachments were moved up towards the first houses at the edge of the village. Thus far, they had scarcely come within range of the fire of the Patriots. It was now two o'clock, and the troops had not begun an attack.

Finally, under cover of the smoke from a house near the church set on fire by a scouting-detachment and after a heavy two hour bombardment, Colborne ordered the advance. The bayonet charge took place as the fire caught three of the houses where the Patriots were barricaded. Driven forth by the smoke and flames, they fought as they could, against many times their number, fell, or attempted to escape across the ice.

There remained only the Church, which some of Colborne's men managed to enter from the rear, and set fire to.

As the Patriots made a rush out of the building, one of them, named Forget, was recognized by a captain of the Government volunteers. "What are you doing here, Forget?" exclaimed the officer. "Fighting for my country," came the brief, bitter answer. A few minutes later Forget and his two sons died under the fire of the Government troops.

Chénier, also, fell fighting, after leaping from a window of the church.

At four o'clock, the whole village was in flames. As night came on, the disbanded troops gave themselves up to rapine and pillage. Their orgies, according to Paquin, the Constitutionalist curé of the place, were worthy of those of the Vandals and the Visigoths. Sixty houses were reduced to ashes by the fire; those that remained were ransacked by drunken troops and volunteers. The body of Chénier was taken to the inn, and left lying on the counter for three whole days. The heart was cut out and exposed to view in the window. "Come and see how rotten your leader's heart was!" jeered the troops. Meanwhile, Colborne and his suite were being wined and dined at Globenski's manor house, the seigneur having come into his own once more.

The troops had lost about thirty killed; the Patriots, well over twice that number, and more than a hundred prisoners.

Next day, Colborne marched to meet Townshend at St. Benoit. Caught between two armies of two thousand men each, with no hope of aid from any quarter, the handful of Patriots there decided to surrender. The only answer to their flag of truce was a repetition of the ravaging, fire and pillage with which St. Eustache had been visited. Colborne departed only



when the flames reached his own headquarters in the village. St. Benoit was razed to the ground.

Girouard, captured shortly afterward, wrote to a friend while in prison the following account of Colborne's sack of St. Benoit:

"It would be impossible for me to describe to you the desolation which his march and the barbarous scenes accompanying it spread throughout our homes... A considerable number of the inhabitants were assembled in my courtyard, which, as you know, is very large; they were lined up, and two cannon placed in the gateway were aimed at them, while they were told that they would be exterminated in a few minutes. There are no insults and outrages which were not heaped on them, no threats which were not made, to intimidate them into declaring the hiding-places of those who were called their leaders. Not one would give the least indication... Some officers having learned that Paul Barazeau had guided me to Eboulis, they tortured him to force him to tell my place of retreat. They put a pistol to his throat and several times placed him on a block, threatening to behead him, but the generous Patriot held his ground, and the barbarians' violence was wasted.

"Then began scenes of devastation and destruction more atrocious than any seen in a town taken by storm and given over to pillage after a long, hard siege. After completely pillaging the village, the enemy set fire to it and reduced it from one end to the other to a heap of ashes. They then went in different directions, ravaging and burning on their way, carrying their fire as far as the village of St. Scholastique."

Replying to the Tory "explanation," that this

was all done without Sir John Colborne's authorization, Girouard countered:

"If the lieutenant-general had given orders that property was to be respected, how can he have allowed it to be pillaged and burned under his own eyes at St. Eustache, and even more at St. Benoit, where not a shot had been fired? How is it that the church and village of St. Benoit were set afire while His Excellency was there — so much so, that he had difficulty, on leaving my house (one of the last to be burned) in reaching the high-road, and his horses got their hairs singed..."

No, His Excellency earned his title of "the Firebrand" (Vieux Brulot); and it was not without justification, when he was named Lord Seaton, that the French Canadians, with bitter memories in their hearts, pronounced it "Satan".



## Chapter VII

### THE ARMED STRUGGLE — II

In their Declaration of July 31st, the Upper Canada Reformers had pledged their support to the movement of the Patriots in Lower Canada. At the same time they proceeded, under Mackenzie's leadership, with preparations for a people's convention, which was to assume power with the support of a mass demonstration at Toronto. The local committees in a short time enrolled the names of fifteen hundred men who would be ready, in case a resort to arms should become necessary.

Early in November, a messenger from Lower Canada reached Toronto, with a report on the crisis which was developing there, and which seemed to indicate an inevitable armed collision.

The leading committee of Reformers thereupon met to discuss what was to be done. As Bond Head had cheerfully sent away all of the troops to Lower Canada, leaving the Government defenceless (he later claimed to have done this in order to lead the Reformers to revolt), a peculiarly favorable situation existed in which to carry out a seizure of power.

Mackenzie, writing six weeks later from the encampment at Navy Island, described as follows the decision reached by the Reformers, and the steps taken to carry it out:

"About the third week in November it was determined that on Thursday the 7th of December, our forces should secretly assemble at Montgomery's Hotel, 3 miles back of Toronto, between 6 and 10 at night,

### THE ARMED STRUGGLE — II

and proceeding from thence to the city, join our friends there, seize 4000 stand of arms, which had been placed by Sir Francis in the City Hall, take him into custody, with his chief advisers, place the garrison in the hands of the liberals, declare the Province free, call a convention together, to frame a suitable constitution, and meantime appoint our friend Dr. Rolph, provincial administrator of the government. We expected to do all this without shedding blood, well knowing that the vice-regal government was too unpopular to have many real adherents.

"Only in one instance did we forward a notice of the intended movement beyond the limits of the county of York, and to Whitby and some other towns in it no circulars were sent. We never doubted the feeling of the Province. Sir F. admits in "his speech from the throne," that we would have cheerfully submitted the whole matter to a convention of the people.

"Twelve leading reformers in the city and country agreed, one day in November, that on Thursday the 7th of December last, between the hours of six and ten in the evening, the friends of freedom in the several townships, led by their captains, would meet at Montgomery's, march to Toronto, seize the arms so much wanted, dismiss Sir Francis, and proclaim a Republic. The details were left entirely to my management; and an executive in the city was named to correspond with Mr. Papineau and our other friends below, afford intelligence, aid our efforts, and finally, to join the army at Montgomery's. It was also stipulated that no attempt should be made by that executive to alter the time on which we were to revolt, without consulting with me in the first instance.

"The country was rife for a change, and I employ-



ed a fortnight previous to Sunday the 3rd December, in attending secret meetings, assisting in organizing towns and places, and otherwise preparing for the revolution. On that day, I rode from Southville (where I had two private meetings on the Saturday) to Yonge street; and arrived at Mr. Gibson's in the evening. To my astonishment and dismay, I was informed by him, that although I had given the captains of Townships sealed orders for Thursday following, the executive, through him, by a mere verbal message, had ordered out the men beyond the ridges, to attend at Montgomery's with their arms next day, Monday, and that it was probable they were already on the march."

What had happened?

Dr. Rolph, with his "preternatural caution," had taken fright at hearing certain rumours which were going the rounds of the city: that the Reformers were to be arrested, that the Orangemen were to be armed and a militia raised to defend the Government, and more in the same vein. His friends, Bidwell, and the Baldwins had already shown signs of dissociating themselves from the movement; and Dr. Morrison, another of those who had met at Doel's, was wavering. The panicky frame of mind in which Rolph found himself is indicated by the fact that the day after he sent Lount the message to change the date, he apparently changed his mind, and sent a second message to say that he had overestimated the danger. The following day—Monday, the 3rd — he was once more convinced that all was lost and that the movement should be disbanded.

His vacillations had in the interval completely disorganized the arrangements for the march on the city. Mackenzie attempted to get word to Lount, to have the original plan maintained; but it was by then too

late, as in Lount's section the march had already begun. Only a small number, however, had been informed of the change; the rest were going ahead with preparations for the 7th. Among these latter Van Egmond, a veteran of Napoleon's wars, who had been named commander-in-chief of the popular forces, with Samuel Lount and Anthony Anderson as his lieutenants.

Thanks to Rolph's panic, therefore, a force was gathering on the outskirts of Toronto without the leadership or even the knowledge of the man supposed to command it; and Mackenzie, Lount and Anderson were obliged to undertake the task of seizing the capital with a few hundred men for whom a minimum of preparation, in arms, provisions, etc., had not yet been made.

To add to the difficulty, Anderson, the one man at Montgomery's with some military experience, was shot and killed on Monday night, while on a reconnoitering expedition with Mackenzie. This blow was all the more serious, as Mackenzie was entirely without military knowledge or training.

Mackenzie was in favour of advancing on the city during the night, but was over-ruled; he continues:

"Next day (Tuesday) we increased in number to 800, of whom very many had no arms, others had rifles, old fowling pieces, Indian guns, pikes, etc. Vast numbers came and went off again, when they found we had neither muskets or bayonets. Had they possessed my feeling in favour of freedom, they would have stood by us even if armed but with pitchforks and broom handles.

"After noon we obtained correct intelligence that with all his exertions, and including the College boys, Sir Francis could hardly raise 150 supporters in town



and country; and by one P.M. a flag of truce reached our camp near the city, the messengers being the Honorables Messrs. Rolph and Baldwin, deputed by Sir Francis to ask what would satisfy us. I replied, "Independence"; but sent a verbal message that as we had no confidence in Sir F's word, he would have to send his messages in writing, and within one hour. I then turned round to Colonel Lount, and advised him to march the men under his command at once into the city, and take a position near the Lawyers Hall, and rode westward to Colonel Baldwin's where the bulk of the rebels were, and advised an instant march to Toronto. We had advanced as far as the College Ave., when another flag of truce arrived, by the same messengers, with a message from Sir F. declining to comply with our previous request."

The presence of Rolph and Baldwin as emissaries of the Family Compact completely disconcerted the Rebel force. The future head of the Provisional Government, and an outstanding moderate Reformer, had then gone over to the side of Bond Head? According to Dent's ardent defence of Rolph, the latter had accepted the mission out of fear of arrest, in case he should refuse. He is reputed, according to certain accounts, to have spoken confidentially for a moment with Lount, urging him to advance at once and take the city; according to others, he told them not to come into Toronto till the evening. In any case, his appearance with the flag of truce had a thoroughly demoralizing effect. A letter from Ryerson throws light on the repercussions of this incident: "I was in Cobourg," he writes, "when the volunteers rallied from all parts and the report was there that Rolph and Bidwell were under arms in defence of the city against Mackenzie. You may judge

of the effect of this report throughout the province — it doubled the number of volunteers in defence of the government."

Such was the service rendered to Sir Francis by the timorous Right wing Reformers; having rendered it, they made their escape, without so much as waiting to see what would be the outcome of the struggle. Rolph fled on Wednesday, and Bidwell accepted Bond Head's offer of voluntary exile. Baldwin was sufficiently conservative in his leanings to be able to remain without danger.

On Tuesday at about six o'clock, a skirmish between a detachment of Mackenzie's men and Government volunteers ended in both parties beating a retreat. Despite the arrival of reinforcements during the night, Wednesday morning found the Rebel camp with a force reduced to about five hundred and fifty men. It was decided to remain on the defensive, while awaiting the arrival of Van Egmond with the main force, expected next day, as originally planned. A message to Rolph, asking for information as to when Bond Head might be expected to make an attack, went unanswered: the gentleman was already in full flight. (Girod had fled from St. Eustache, announcing that he was "going to seek reinforcements": Rolph, with a less militant imagination, went "to visit a sick relative").

"Gentlemen of influence," observes Mackenzie, "who were pledged to join us, and even the executive who commanded us to make the premature and unfortunate movement, neither corresponded with us nor joined us. To explain their conduct was beyond my power. It discouraged many and thinned our ranks."

Then, continuing his account of the operations of that day and Thursday:



"My chief hope lay in this, that if we were not attacked till Thursday night, vast reinforcements would join us from the outer townships, and that reformers at a distance would march to our aid, the moment they heard that we had struck for self-Government. With this view, I sought to confine the attention of the enemy to the defence of the city, and on Thursday morning selected 40 Rifleman and 20 others to go down and burn the Don Bridge, the eastern approach to Toronto, and the house at its end, to take the Montreal mail stage and mails, and to draw out the forces in that quarter if possible. I also proposed that the rest of our men who had arms, should take the direction to the right or left, or to retreat to a strong position as prudence might dictate. At this moment Colonel Van Egmond, a native of Holland, owning 13,000 acres of land in the Huron Tract, a tried patriot, and of great military experience under Napoleon, joined us, and one of the Captains desired a council to be held, which was done. Col. V. approved of my plan, a party went off, set fire the bridge, burnt the house, took the mails and went through a part of the city unmolested. But the counselling and discussing of my project occasioned a delay of two hours, which proved our ruin, for the enemy having obtained large reinforcements by the steamers from Cobourg, Niagara and Hamilton, resolved to attack us in three divisions, one of them to march up Yonge street, and the others by ways about a mile to the right and left of the road. Had our forces started in the morning, the party at the bridge would have interfered with and broken up the enemy's plan of attack, and we would have been in motion near Toronto, ready to retreat to some of the commanding

positions in its rear, or to join the riflemen below and there enter the city.

"We were still at the hotel, discussing what was best to be done, when one of the guards told us that the enemy was marching up with music and artillery and within a mile of us. Our people immediately prepared for battle, I rode down towards the enemy, doubting the intelligence, until when within a short distance I saw them with my own eyes. I rode quickly back, asked our men if they were ready to fight a greatly superior force, well armed, and with artillery well served. They were ready and I bade them to go the woods and do their best. They did so, and never did men fight more courageously. In the face of a heavy fire of grape and cannister, with broadsides of musketry in steady and rapid succession, they stood their ground firmly and killed and wounded a large number of the enemy, but were at length compelled to retreat. In a more favorable position, I have no doubt but they would have beaten the assailants with immense loss. As it was, they had only three killed and three or four wounded.

"The manly courage with which two hundred farmers, miserably armed, withstood the formidable attack of an enemy 1200 strong, and who had plenty of ammunition, with new muskets and bayonets, artillery, first rate European officers, and the choice of a position of attack, convinces me that discipline, order, obedience and subordination, under competent leaders would enable them speedily to attain a confidence sufficient to foil even the regulars from Europe. About 200 of our friends stood at the tavern during the battle, being unarmed.

"Mr. Fletcher, Col. Van Egmond, myself and others, held a consultation near Hogg's Hollow, and concluded that it would be useless to re-assemble our scattered



forces, for that without arms success would be doubtful and I determined to pass over to the United States, and accomplished my purpose in three days, travelled 125 miles, was seen by 2000 persons at least, and with a reward of 4000 dollars as advertised for my head, speedily reached Buffalo."

The failure of the march on Toronto was due firstly to Rolph's bungling and betrayal: and in the second place, to the lack of military leadership during the period from Monday to Thursday morning. That the city might have been taken, even before Thursday, seems certain. The Government was only able to enrol a couple of hundred men for its defence, out of a total population of twelve thousand. It was not until Wednesday that reinforcements were hurriedly brought in. Dent is of the opinion that had Mackenzie been successful, the Provisional Government would have had the support of the Reformers throughout the province; he then admits — "had the entire body of Upper Canadian Reformers taken part in the movement, there can be little doubt that the Government would have been at least temporarily overthrown . . ."

## II

A revolutionary tide such as that which had risen in the Canadas could not be expected to abate overnight, in spite of the defeats which had been inflicted. A new phase of the struggle now opened, a series of rear-guard engagements, all of which, with the exception of that in Lower Canada, in November 1838, were suppressed without extreme difficulty by the Government, into whose hands the initiative passed.

This phase of the struggle was distinguished from

the preceding one in this, that whereas before the Reformers had counted almost entirely on the strength of their own movement, the emphasis was now shifted: the main hope lay in such support from the United States as might enable frontier expeditions to be launched, and in this way cause the Reform forces to rally once more for the offensive. A second difference consisted in the fact that there was now greater political clarity in the minds of the leaders: it was now evident that only a policy of the offensive, secession and a Republic could achieve the full Reform program.

It was not without justification that the Reformers looked to the American democrats for support. There had been numerous expressions of sympathy from Americans in all of the Northern States. In the following months money, arms and munitions were collected to aid the Canadians, and many volunteered for service in the expeditionary forces which were formed. Meetings were held in towns and cities from Detroit and Cleveland to New York.

All of this activity, however, was the result of more or less spontaneous, unorganized popular sympathy. The authorities, with some few exceptions, adopted an attitude of aloof neutrality. The Southern slave-owners, who feared complications with England which would affect their cotton market, brought pressure to bear on the President, Van Buren: and the financial interests were equally opposed to risking a war with England. The hope of active governmental aid from the United States was thus doomed to disappointment.

On December 13, scarcely a week after the defeat at Montgomery's, Mackenzie crossed over at the head of a small expedition, to Navy Island, in the Niagara



River just above the Falls. From here it was hoped that a junction could be effected with the forces led by Dr. Duncombe, in the London district. These latter, however, handicapped by lack of arms and of an effective organization, dispersed at the approach of Col. Mac-Nab, who had marched against them with a contingent from Toronto. The Navy Island expedition was finally abandoned, a month after Mackenzie had landed there.

During January, an attempt was made to take Windsor and Sandwich, with an expedition from Detroit; but lack of leadership here also led to failure; A similar fate befell an attack in the neighbourhood of Kingston, in the month following.

In the summer of 1838, a network of "Hunters' Lodges" sprang up, at first in Vermont and later with headquarters in Cleveland, having as their object the liberation of the Canadas. This movement was composed in part of Canadians, refugees in the States, and in part of American sympathizers. Under its leadership an attempt was made at a concerted series of invasions at Windsor, Prescott, and in Lower Canada.

This was the third attempt in the direction of Windsor, those made in January, and July having both failed. This time, four hundred men crossed over, and penetrated into the heart of the town before being driven back. Twenty-five of them were killed; four of these were shot in cold blood after being taken prisoner.

At Prescott, an expedition under Van Shultz took possession of a mill, and held it for four days, (Nov. 12-16) while vainly awaiting reinforcements. They finally surrendered, after four companies of the 83rd Regiment, with three pieces of artillery, arrived from Kingston. Eleven prisoners, including Van Shultz, were executed.

In Lower Canada, the movement took on more serious proportions. After an unsuccessful attempt made at Napierville, in February, under Dr. Robert Nelson (brother of Wolfred), the summer of 1838 was spent in organizational preparations for a rising to take place in the autumn.

November 3rd was fixed as the date for the rising. While Nelson was to march on Napierville, the Patriots were to rise simultaneously and take possession of Sorel, Chambly, Laprairie and Beauharnois; those at St. Martin, St. Rose and Terrebonne were to seize the Lachapelle bridge, north of Montreal, while those in Two-Mountains were likewise to cut off Montreal's communications, by watching the Ottawa.

Nelson crossed the border and took up his position at Napierville, where he was soon joined by about two thousand Patriots. A proclamation was issued, declaring the Independence of Lower Canada. Among the points contained in the declaration were the following:

"That from this day forward, the people of Lower Canada are absolved from all allegiance to Great Britain, and that the political connexion between that part and Lower Canada is now dissolved.

"That a republican form of government is best suited to Lower Canada, which is this day declared to be a republic.

"That under the free government of Lower Canada all persons shall enjoy the same rights: the Indians shall no longer be under any civil disqualification, but shall enjoy the same rights as any other citizens of Lower Canada.

"That all union between church and state is hereby declared to be dissolved, and every person shall be at liberty freely to exercise such religion or belief as shall



be dictated to him by his conscience.

"That the feudal or seigniorial tenure of land is hereby abolished as completely as if such tenure had never existed in Canada.

"That sentence of death shall no longer be passed or executed, except in cases of murder.

"That the liberty and freedom of the press shall exist in all public matters and affairs.

"That trial by jury is guaranteed to the people of Lower Canada in its most extended and liberal sense.

"That as general and public education is necessary, and due by the Government to the people, an act to provide for the same shall be passed as soon as the circumstances of the country will permit.

"To secure the elective franchise, all elections shall be had by ballot.

"That the French and English languages shall be used in all public affairs."

In Montreal, Colborne (who had now replaced Durham as Governor-General, after the former's brief administration) declared martial law; and proceeded, with some six to seven thousand troops, and a battery of artillery, to march on Napierville.

Here, Nelson's two thousand men had less than three hundred rifles amongst them; arms and munitions were expected from across the border, but a proclamation of President Van Buren and the intervention of the American authorities cut off most of the supply. A schooner, laden with a couple of hundred rifles, a cannon and ammunition, was sent down Lake Champlain, and anchored off Rousse's Point on the evening of the 5th; but a force of government volunteers having seized the mill at Lacolle, mid-way between the foot of the

lake and Napierville, the supplies were intercepted and communications cut off.

At the approach of Colborne's main force, the Patriots fell back on Odelltown, close to the frontier, in the hope of saving his lines of communication. Odelltown was in the hands of volunteers. Caught between Colborne's force and the volunteers, who were shortly to be reinforced, the Patriots put up a stiff fight of three hours duration, and once more reaction swept the south shore of the St. Lawrence; the whole county of Laprairie was given over to fire and pillage, and the jails filled with hundreds of prisoners.

The price of patriotism was to be paid, not for the first time in history, on the scaffold or in exile . . .

### III

On the morning of April 12, 1838, Samuel Lount and Peter Matthews were executed in Toronto, at the corner of King and Toronto Streets on the charge of high treason.

The new Lieutenant Governor, Sir George Arthur, received petitions bearing thousands of signatures, asking for a mitigation of punishment; five thousand persons signed them in the New-Market district, four thousand more in the Dundas area, in addition to those in Toronto itself. However, having attached himself, like his predecessors, to the Compact clique, Arthur refused to yield. He had come to Canada after serving as Governor of the criminal colony in Van Diemen's Land, and brought with him all the characteristics of a hardened executioner.

Writing on the day of the execution, a con-



temporary described as follows the way in which Lount and Matthews met their death:

"At their execution they manifested very good composure. Sheriff Jarvis burst into tears when he entered the room to prepare them for execution. They said to him very calmly, 'Mr. Jarvis, do your duty. We are prepared to meet death and our judge'. They then, both of them, put their arms around his neck and kissed him. They were then prepared for the execution, they walked to the gallows with entire composure and firmness of step."

Men of the working people, blacksmith and farmer, Lount and Matthews thus paid the price of their loyalty to the cause of a free Canada.

When their families asked that the bodies be given into their care, the Governor refused the request. They were buried in Potters' Field (now the corner of Bloor and Yonge Streets) whence they were later transferred to the Necropolis.

Dr. Morrison, who was also under arrest, was tried and acquitted. A number of others (some of whom managed to escape) were sentenced to deportation to Australia.

On Lord Durham's arrival, he found the jails in Lower Canada packed with prisoners. Fearing the effects of public trials, he had his Special Council adopt an "Ordinance to provide for the security of Lower Canada," whereby eight Patriot leaders (including Wolfred Nelson and B. Viger) were to be deported to Bermuda; a dozen others, of those who were already in the United States, (including Papineau, Duvernay, T. S. Brown, canon Chartier, and George Etienne Cartier) were declared guilty of high treason and condemned to be executed should they re-enter Canada.

The rest of the prisoners were set free. On news reaching England, of these sentences passed without trial of the accused, the Government was forced to disallow the Ordinance; whereupon Durham resigned his post and returned to England.

His place was taken by Colborne, who at the first opportunity resorted to the method of court-martial, in order to crush opposition. Those taken prisoner during the 1838 risings, were accordingly court-martialled: sixty-eight were sentenced to deportation to Botany Bay, whither they were sent in chains: twelve were sentenced to be hanged, and died, like Lount and Matthews, on the scaffold.

Of those executed in Montreal, one, Hamelin, was eighteen years old; Daunais and Duquet were each twenty; Narbonne, twenty-three. Cardinal, who was thirty, wrote to his wife on the eve of his execution:

"Tomorrow, at the time that I am writing now, my soul will be before its Creator and Judge . . . My only regret, in dying, is that I leave you, dear one, with five unhappy orphans, of whom one is not yet born . . ."

Another of the twelve, DeLorimier, wrote before his death this "political Testament":—

"I die without remorse; all that I desired was the good of my country, in insurrection and in independence . . . For 17 to 18 years I have taken an active part in almost every popular movement, always with conviction and sincerity. My efforts have been for the independence of my compatriots; thus far we have been-unfortunate . . .

"But the wounds of my country will heal — The peace-loving Canadian will see liberty and happiness born anew on the St. Lawrence . . .



"To you my compatriots, my execution and that of my comrades on the scaffold will be of use . . .

"I have only a few hours to live, and I have sought to divide them between my duty to religion and that due to my compatriots; for them I die on the gallows the infamous death of a murderer, for them I leave behind my young children and my wife, alone, for them I die with the cry on my lips: Vive La Liberté, Vive l'Indépendance!"

## CONCLUSION

### DEFEAT AND VICTORY.

The rising of 1837-38 suffered a military defeat. Politically, however, it marked a turning point in this country's history, winning responsible government and opening the path to vast industrial expansion and to ultimate nationhood. In this, historical sense, the rising was victorious. The crushing of the Rebellion meant, however, that it was to be to some extent a postponed victory, instead of an immediate one; and a partial, limited one, instead of one carried to its full conclusion.

Looking back over the struggle, it becomes clear that three main causes were responsible for the defeat of the Rebellion.

First: the influence on the Reform movement of the defection of the Right wing. The effect which this had in Upper Canada has already been seen: it weakened the movement in the years preceding the outbreak, and spread disorganization in the course of the rising itself. In Lower Canada, the influence of this factor tends to be overshadowed by the undoubtedly important rôle played by the opposition of the Catholic hierarchy. None the less, it is interesting to note that the clerical-conservative "Devoir", in its issue of May 1st 1937, devotes an article to lauding Etienne Parent, editor of the Right wing Reform paper, "Le Canadien" — an article in which it is suggested that in commemorating the Rebellion all honour should be paid to those who helped combat it: "We must not forget to give prominence to the role of him who so greatly contribu-



ted to holding the population to their duty, to the extent that Gosford in the House of Lords . . . was able to argue truly that the rebellion had been that of a small number". If the majority of the Canadians stood aside from the Rebellion, the article continues, "this attitude had been prepared and inspired by certain leaders . . . Their role tends to be too often overlooked. After all, it was they who inspired a tendency directly opposed to the flaming appeals of Papineau and the "Patriots" . . . (Parent) displayed a courage, an energy, a persistence beyond all praise. He did not believe in the success of the Rebellion and he had the fearlessness to warn his compatriots against it . . ."

The heroes of 1837, in the eyes of the present ruling class, are those who stabbed the movement in the back.

Secondly, the defeat can be attributed to the fatal policy of the defensive pursued, at least until 1838, in Lower Canada. That this arose from a lack of a clear understanding of the historical task which faced the Patriots, is true; and the fact that Papineau was himself a seigneur, may have influenced his opposition to an offensive; in any case, the outcome was disastrous. "The defensive is the death of every armed rising . . ."

Lastly, weakness in organization and in operative leadership contributed heavily to defeat. Under this heading must be included: lack of military leadership; ineffectual communications (particularly in the struggle above Toronto); failure to co-ordinate the movements in the country side with any decisive actions in the cities, Montreal and Toronto.

In the last phase of the Rebellion, in 1838, there was the additional factor: the failure to secure the hoped-for aid from the government of the United

States; but by this time, despite a continuing effervescence, the main tide of the Canadian movement had begun to ebb; and American democracy was too much under the firm domination of the financial and slave-owning interests, to be won to the Canadian cause.

## II

Instead of an independent, republican Canada, united by the victorious masses of the people under a fully democratic constitution, the gains which the Rebellion brought were only yielded gradually, as concessions from above, by a shaken but unvanquished Colonial power and Family Compact.

Responsible Government was officially recognized in the first decade after the rising: but an elective Upper House has not yet been won. The Union of 1841 was directed against the French-Canadians, and only failed in its object thanks to their continued struggle for survival as a people. Seigneurial tenure was abolished nearly twenty years after the Rebellion, but with the payment of millions of dollars in "compensation" to the parasitic land-owners. The Confederation which Mackenzie had envisioned was to be established "from above", by the ruling class, thirty years after the revolutionary struggle. As for independent national existence, it was won even more slowly, and then not without a remainder of hampering restrictions.

The fact that the problems of the bourgeois-democratic revolution were solved in this way, was the inevitable outcome of the defeat of the rising. It in no way diminishes the greatness of the debt which the people of this country owe to those who gave their lives and their strength that the democratic cause might triumph . . .



Mackenzie and Papineau, Lount and Matthews, Delorimier and those who died with him, were the true founders of Canadian democracy. If the ruling class which has succeeded to the old Compact has raised few or no statues in their honour, it is only one more indication that those men were of the People, to whom their tradition still belongs.

The century which has passed since 1837 has seen the complete transformation of Canada, from a backward, semi-feudal colony, to a great industrial nation. The changes wrought by the Rebellion opened the path to a vast economic upsurge, which, gathering impetus at the turn of the century, saw capital investment in manufactures pass from \$78 millions in 1870 to over \$5 billions in 1930.

But the industrial expansion, as has been the case with capitalism throughout the world, has seen the steady concentration in the hands of a few, of the wealth produced by millions; the masters of capital, grouped in a handful of powerful trusts, have in their turn become a stifling oppressive oligarchy. As the expansion of productive power has come ever more violently into collision with the capitalist framework, the power and privilege of a minority have come more and more to exist only at the price of unspeakable suffering among the working people of the cities and the farms.

A news item of April 30, 1937, states:

"Ottawa, Ont., Less than 200,000 persons in Canada receive incomes large enough to come within reach of the income tax collector. Income taxes are levied on single persons who receive over \$1,000 per year and married men who receive over \$2,000. The great mass of Canadians receive lower than this.

"Of the 199,092 persons who paid income tax last year, 89,724, or 45.06 per cent., receive incomes under \$2,000. Taxes paid by this class of taxpayer amounted to only 2.96 per cent. of the total paid in income taxes.

"In contrast, and showing the extremely unequal distribution of wealth, 304 persons, or fifteen-one-hundredths of one per-cent. of the total number of taxpayers, received incomes large enough to yield a total of \$11,055,666 or 33.13 per cent. of the total tax receipts."

Because in these last years, those millions of Canadians for whom the Crisis has never ended have begun to move forward towards trade union organization, towards political awareness, — the powers of finance-capital have begun to fear for their profits, for their power as a ruling minority. Black, Tory reaction, their weapon against the people, has begun to threaten the very existence of democratic liberty.

If the problems of insecurity and exploitation, which darken hundreds of thousands of Canadian homes, are to be met and faced; if the wealth of Canada is to pass from the control of an irresponsible minority to that of the working people as a whole, and collective misery be replaced by collective well-being — then the path must be kept open, the democratic liberties of Canadians must be preserved.

In the defence of Canadian democracy, — and let no one believe that democracy can be defended otherwise than through the organized strength of the people — the people of this country may well inscribe on their banner the motto of the Canadian revolutionaries of 1837:

"The strength of the people is as nothing without union!"



## APPENDIX

### The Permanent and Central Committee of the County of Montreal, to the Workingmen's Association of London. \*

BROTHERS, — We have received the Address of the London Workingmen's Association to the people of Canada. It has been read amidst enthusiastic cheers, at a meeting of our Permanent and Central Committee, and published in our newspapers. It has gone abroad over the American Continent, as evidence that the bold democratic spirit which shook off the grasp of sordid Barons, and fixed limits to the prerogatives of arbitrary Sovereigns, still animates a portion of your citizens.

The glory of your nation has ever been the existence of its recognized democracy, which enabled you throughout long and bitter struggles to maintain a degree of liberty and political power superior to that possessed by your European neighbors. We accept, therefore, with grateful thanks, the sympathy of a democracy endowed with such exalted and correct sentiments on the nature of Government.

Aristocracy is a stranger to us. With it we hold not, have not, any principles in common. Thanks to the facility with which our ancestors have been able to obtain fertile land in a territory of unlimited extent, and to our laws which prevent the accumulation of hereditary wealth, nearly our whole population is dependent for a subsistence on manual or mental labor. We respect men for their good works; we despise them for their misdeeds, whatever may have been the deserts of their fathers. We honor him who causes two blades of corn to sprout where only one grew before; who goes

\* This Letter is not given here in full. A section is omitted.

## APPENDIX

forth and makes the forest disappear before his footsteps; we despise the idler who vegetates on the earth a mere consumer of what better men produce. The distinctive names of your various mechanical occupations appear to our eyes more honorable than the pompous titles, oppressive privileges, and unnatural hereditary legislations, which have been usurped, and granted by Sovereigns, and registered in herald's offices, in the vain attempt to create two orders of intelligence where nature has made but one.

We live in a hemisphere chosen for the untrammelled action and free growth of democracy, unstinted by any proximity to an exhausting, deep-rooted aristocracy. The few exotics of that tribe transplanted from another world, wither and disappear from a soil which affords no nourishment to their order, and upon which Equal Rights were stamped in everlasting characters when it first emerged from chaos.

In the free exercise of our acknowledged privileges — in defence of rights guaranteed and dear to us, we have met publicly in our various Counties as a preliminary proceeding, to protest solemnly against the infamous invasion of powers inherently appertaining to us. Conscious of our strength and right, we treated with contempt a silly Proclamation of an ignorant Governor against these meetings. We hope this lesson will not be lost. We trust that it will prevent for the future a presumptuous interference with the people's immunities both here and elsewhere. We are gratified that our conduct in promptly repelling the attack of the British Parliament upon our property has merited your approbation. Have you reflected on the mighty responsibility to the whole British Empire which has devolved upon the people of this Province? — The



British Ministry could never have introduced a monstrous measure which aims at the destruction of the powers of a democracy, acting through their own branch of the Legislature, entirely for the purpose of hastening the payment of a few paltry official salaries, when that object could have been attained by a simple and honest process, were it not that your aristocracy are preparing an unholy scheme for the destruction of your own liberties. Lower Canada is made the theatre of the experiment, because it is imagined that the majority of the population, being of French extraction, though borne down by continued abuse or arbitrary exactions, would excite no sympathy among the English race by which they are surrounded.

For ourselves, rest assured, we are determined never to submit to the intended ministerial usurpation — never to live with the world's finger of derision pointed at us as a people who, more ignorant than slaves that are bought and sold, permitted their birth-right to be wrested from them . . .

Think not that because few in number, we dread the result of this our determination. Nature has given strong fastnesses to our country: to our people strong hearts. Our arms are now the arguments of justice and reason. They can be easily changed for more decided weapons, if the eyes of the invaders of our rights continue too dull to see, and their ears too obtuse to hear. We deem not that armed bands from Europe would now wage exterminating war upon the democracy of America. They are themselves the offspring of a democracy which, in the nineteenth century, is alike in feeling throughout the civilized world. They know they are not blind instruments to do the bidding of a brutal master, but moral agents responsible for their

deeds to God and humanity. When the day of trial arrives, they will rather throw aside the ensign of their cruel occupations to be received into the kindred bosom of an American fraternity, than aid in murderous designs against the heart's blood of a generous people acting for the defence of the common Rights of Man.

We do not assume a tone of defiance to your Government unless forced to it. Our grievances are not of new characters or of recent date. They have been publicly and distinctly stated, and the mode and measures of redress have been plainly defined. Our citizens have at public meetings reiterated them for years past. They have founded upon them humble petitions to your Parliament, which turning a deaf ear, now adds aggression to contempt. Under such circumstances we may safely appeal to the judgment of the whole world for our justification in determining to be deluded no longer with vain hopes of redress from beyond the seas, but to depend alone upon our own energies, and that sympathy from our brethren upon this Continent, which a cause so just must inevitably command.

We have not alluded to a separate independence from the British Crown, but we are not forgetful that the destiny of Continental Colonies severs them from the Metropolitan State whenever the unconstitutional action of a legislative power residing in a distant country is no longer supportable. There is nothing in this prospect to separate the identity of interest which should exist between the democracy of the old world and that of the new. If Colonies are to be made an instrument of corrupt patronage for providing refuge and maintenance for the poorer portion of your aristocracy; an excuse for maintaining standard armies;



for robbing the people of their subsistence to pile up stone and mortar into fortifications, or a pretence for restricting the free operations of your trade, the casting off such as can support themselves can only give stability to your own liberties and advance your national prosperity. You have the example of the United States, which in one year, as an independent offspring, does more for the honor and benefit of the Parent State than she could have accomplished in ages of weak, puling dependent existence.

We again thank you for the sympathy which you express for the people of Canada. It is pleasant to receive such sympathy from Englishmen. You have done a noble act, for since a people is responsible for the deeds of its rulers, yours is a manly and virtuous determination, to inform mankind that you hold yourselves guiltless of the enormity attempted to be committed by those over whose actions you, unfortunately for yourselves and for us, have no control. Whatever may be the result of this your noble patriotism and generous self-devotion, we are assured that you will leave your children better fortified against your domineering Oligarchs than you were yourselves at your entrance into life.

"We desire, through your Association, to proclaim, that whatever course we shall be compelled to adopt, we have no contest with the people of England. We war only against the aggressions of their and our tyrannical oppressors.

"Signed by order, and on behalf, of the Permanent and Central Committee.

L. J. PAPINEAU

R. PLESSIS, President

D. DE LORIMIER, (Sec.), Etc.